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CHAPTER

1

"Kathy," remarked Jonathan, as he sauntered into the living room, "is a dope."

His father, who was leafing through a list of orchid hybrids, grinned without looking up. "I notice you're working from the general to the specific," he murmured. "'Younger sisters are a pain in the neck' was your entrance line yesterday."

"Well, they are," Jonathan agreed. "I think telephone time around here ought to be budgeted, so that somebody with something to *say* could have a chance."

Coming through the hall with a stack of clean turkish towels balanced in one hand and anchored by her chin, Mrs. McCall paused long enough to overhear this suggestion. "Get off the line, dear," she called

playfully to her daughter. "Jonathan wants to phone the President, in Washington."

"A typical female sense of humor. Why do they always have to stick together? Why doesn't Mother even try to make Kathy grow up?" Jonathan slumped on the Chippendale sofa and stared down a long khaki-covered leg to consider, moodily, a size eleven and a half shoe. "You might think she was ten instead of fifteen the way she giggles all day with those girls."

"Girls giggle at any age. Your mother, for instance. . . ." The Professor's voice trailed off, his attention claimed by the open book in his hands. "I thought so," he said to himself. "Crossed with the labiata, back in 1901." He slapped the book shut. "A bicolor. Charming, really. There's one in bloom now. Want to come out to the greenhouse and have a look at it?"

"In a minute," Jonathan said. "I've got this telephone call to make first."

His father, already on his way out of the door, scarcely seemed to hear. He walked with a purposeful stride, and when he almost bumped into Kathy he picked her up by the elbows and set her aside as though she were a doll.

"Don't tell me you're actually finished!" Jonathan spoke to his sister with heavy sarcasm. "You don't have one more itty-bitty word to say?"

"Oh, Jonnie, I wish you'd stop acting so superior." Kathy's tone was dismayed rather than annoyed. "How could I know you were in such a rush?"

"Rush!" Jonathan practically snorted.

Kathy spread her hands in a plea for peace. "Well, go ahead. It's all yours."

Standing back against the bookcase as Jon brushed past her, she almost shrank from his touch, feeling as though she scarcely knew her older brother. Jon was so impatient these days, so full of self-importance, so—she searched for a word to express her feelings—so patronizing!

The fourteen months between their ages, which once had made them close companions, had expanded during this last year like a stretched accordion. It wasn't just that Jon's hands and feet and nose had grown improbably large; it was something more subtle, a disdain for all the family foolishness and hustle-bustle which made living in the McCall household so much fun. He seemed like a stranger, occupied with weighty problems, although he was only one year ahead of Kathy in school. She wasn't especially perturbed that he considered her beneath him—young for her age, and on the silly side—but in a rather special way she missed him. Where was the Jonnie of the bedtime pillow fights? What had happened to the brother who had helped her rig the swing in the oak

tree, who had bandaged her cut knees when she fell off her bike, who had allowed her to tag along on fishing jaunts and taught her how to catch a baseball like a boy?

She could hear Jon dial, then start talking to Rad Cooper in his new deep man's voice. Rad was a senior and editor of the school paper, and Kathy understood why her brother admired him and craved his friendship, but nevertheless she yearned for the bygone days. She felt left out.

Disconsolately, she wandered back to the kitchen, where her mother was testing the potatoes baking for dinner. "Want me to set the table?" she asked.

"Please, sweetie." Mrs. McCall regarded her younger child with an approving smile. "I'll always be late on art-class days, but it's wonderful fun. Stimulating. I feel that I'm doing something creative. Like Dad and his orchids. A hobby of my own."

Kathy nodded sympathetically. She was used to her mother's habit of speaking in phrases rather than in complete sentences, accustomed to her enthusiasm and her young approach to life. Other people's parents always seemed far older than her own to Kathy, although in point of years she knew this was not the case. Still, it must be hard for anyone to believe that trim, slender Annette McCall with her short, flyaway hair and merry laugh was the same age as matronly

Mrs. Walker, who lived next door. And as for her dad! Actually, she supposed, he was older than the headmaster at the Academy, but compared to sedate, slow-moving Mr. Ashley, he seemed like a far younger man.

Unaccustomed to a silent partner in the kitchen, Mrs. McCall wheeled around from the stove. "What's the matter, Kathy? Why so sober? Is it Jon again?"

"I can't understand what makes him so—different," Kathy admitted. "It isn't just that he treats me as though I didn't have a brain cell. He thinks everybody's stupid—even you and Dad."

Mrs. McCall laughed. "He'll outgrow it, pet," she said. "It's just a phase." Lowering her voice, she added, "This is Jon's year for discovering the life of the mind. He thinks we're just frivolous women. Both of us."

Counting out knives and forks, Kathy shook her head. "He doesn't think I'm a woman. He thinks I'm something in pigtails—barely past the milk and Pabulum stage."

Her mother wrinkled her nose in amusement. "People mature on different levels," she murmured ambiguously.

The back door banged, and Dr. McCall stood in the kitchen with an orchid pot in his hands. "Look at this *phalaenopsis amabilis*," he commanded in elation.

"Isn't it a beauty? Five flowers open and more to come!"

"Were you afraid they'd all wither and die while you were in Stockholm?" his wife asked.

"Well, sort of," the professor admitted sheepishly. "Three weeks away from the greenhouse is a long time."

"Do many scientists raise orchids?" Kathy wondered aloud.

"I've never taken a census," her father said. "But remind me to tell you about Gotland, an island in the Baltic where there are more than twenty-five varieties of orchids, growing wild!"

Kathy considered her father affectionately. Like many of the professors in Boston universities, he often traveled to distant places on consulting work or for speaking engagements, but home-coming was always his greatest joy. He had flown in from Europe just two days ago and already the excitement of the trip was being replaced by the excitement of the first fall blossoms in the greenhouse. She smiled at him and he smiled in return. "If you were going to a party I'd give you one of these," he said.

"That would be nice, Daddy, but it wouldn't do."

"Why not?"

"You can't wear your father's orchids," Kathy tried to explain. "They have to be sent by a boy."

"Really? A frustrating custom, since boys can't afford to buy anything." He glanced toward his son, who had just come in through the hall door. "Not even haircuts, it seems."

"Oh dear!" Mrs. McCall exclaimed. "It is rather a mane. And with school starting tomorrow. Don't you really *think*—"

Jonathan patted his mother's arm consolingly. "Wait till I can braid it," he proposed.

"But the first day of school?"

"Face it, Mother. All the barber shops close at half past five."

Mrs. McCall looked beyond him at the kitchen clock. "Dinner in just a few minutes," she promised. "Richard, have you closed up the greenhouse, dear? Put butter on the table, Kathy. Jon, pour the water and milk, please, and if you're going to want all those ghastly sauces for your hamburger, get them now."

Cupboard doors clicked, knives clattered, liquid gurgled into glasses. In pleasant confusion the family was finally assembled at the dinner table. "There!" said Mrs. McCall in a mixture of relief and satisfaction. She smiled impartially across the candles at everyone.

In that instant, as though by a prearranged signal, the telephone rang, and although Kathy started to push back her chair, Jon leaped to answer it. The pro-

fessor groaned and his wife sighed. "Typical," she murmured.

In the McCall house the downstairs telephone was located in a corner under the stairs. It afforded convenience but little privacy, and everyone listened for Jon's muttered hello and the subsequent, "Just a minute, please."

"It's for you," he told Kathy, upon returning. "Why don't you ask your little friends to quit calling at mealtimes?"

"How do I know when mealtimes are?" asked Kathy, with good humor and considerable candor.

"A nice curtain line," murmured her father.

Mrs. McCall chuckled unconcernedly. "Routine is such a bore."

"I'm feature editor of the *Orbit* this year, you know," Jonathan announced, in the momentary silence which followed.

"Can Brenda come and stay all night?" Kathy interrupted from the hall.

Mrs. McCall looked contemplative. "I guess so, dear."

Jonathan groaned. "The *Orbit*," he said, and spelled it. "Our school paper. I just thought somebody might be interested."

"We are," said his father, with becoming emphasis.

But Jon was unappeased. "The trouble with this

family," he commented, "is that everybody's always too busy to listen."

"I'm not," said Kathy, slipping into her place. "What did you want to say?" She hadn't meant to be humorous. She was quite sincere. But Jon scowled worldlessly, and her parents did their best not to smile.

"Why Brenda tonight?" Mrs. McCall asked, after an interval of conspicuous quiet. "When tomorrow's the first day of school."

"It's because it *is* the first day of school," Kathy said in surprise. She had taken it for granted that her mother would understand the importance of sharing with her best friend the experience of going into tenth grade.

But this elicited another groan from Jonathan. "Oh, my aching head!" he muttered, and clapped a hand to his temple.

"Not that I want to change the subject," said Dr. McCall, drawing a letter in an airmail envelope from his jacket pocket, "but I have here a matter of some import."

Kathy recognized the distinctive foreign stamps as the same as those on her father's messages from Stockholm. She waited curiously as he unfolded the single onionskin sheet. "It's a letter from Professor Hedlund. You remember Hedlund, dear." He glanced across the candles at his wife. "The physicist who visited us

a year ago from the Royal Institute of Technology."

Mrs. McCall nodded rather vaguely as Kathy said in surprise, "He came *here*?"

"Not to the house," her mother explained. "*Us* means the university in this case."

"Go on, Dad," Jon said.

But Dr. McCall was still looking at his wife. "You do remember, don't you, Annette, that we discussed his son—the younger one—before I left for Stockholm?"

"Oh yes! About Jonathan's age, you said. What was his name?"

"Per."

"Of course. *Pear*, you pronounce it. Swedish for Peter," Mrs. McCall remarked, with a glance in Kathy's direction.

"Well," said Mr. McCall, speaking slowly for emphasis, "he has decided to accept our invitation."

"Invitation?" Annette McCall looked puzzled, then confused, and finally astonished. Her brown eyes widened, and she leaned forward with the palms of her hands grasping the edge of the table. "You mean—"

"I'll read you the letter," her husband said.

Kathy, now completely mystified, listened with a sense of mounting excitement. By the time her father reached the second paragraph it became completely clear that Per Hedlund, the son of her father's friend,

was coming to Boston to live with the McCalls for the winter.

Jonathan, his mouth ajar, was shocked. "Who dreamed this one up?" he wanted to know. "Talk about bombshells!"

His mother glanced at him with a certain understanding. She looked as though she considered it something of a bombshell herself. "Goodness, Richard! When you mentioned it I rather thought it was just a token invitation. I didn't dream—"

"But you sounded as though you thought it was such a good idea!"

Annette McCall gulped. "I did—I do." She managed an encouraging smile.

Kathy clapped her hands. "I think it's simply the greatest! Where'll he sleep? The guest room? Will he go to school?"

Responding to her instant enthusiasm, Dr. McCall regarded his daughter warmly. "School is the general idea. Then perhaps Jon can visit the Hedlunds another year." He waved a hand toward the future. "For the summer or something. It can be worked out."

Jon straightened with self-importance. "That might be very interesting," he said.

"When is he coming?" asked Mrs. McCall, in housewifely consternation, and Kathy could tell that to her mother the future was immediate.

"I'm to let them know." Dr. McCall returned to the letter and read, "'Per can fly on a day's notice. There is no reservation problem at this time of year.'"

"You'd better cable," Jonathan suggested practically. "The first couple of weeks of school are always important. Especially to an upperclassman," he added for Kathy's benefit.

Now, inevitably, everybody began to talk at once. "The guest room won't do at all," decided Mrs. McCall. "He'd have to share Kathy's bath. We'll put him up on the third floor with Jon; that's what we'll do."

Jonathan had the room which Kathy considered the best in the house. Formerly used as a library, it had a fireplace, a beamed ceiling, and bookcases lining the walls. It also had complete privacy, which Jon cherished.

"Hey! Suppose the guy's a dope?" he objected. "Aw, Mother, I don't see why—"

But Mrs. McCall was hurrying on to side issues. "We'll move the couch bed from your father's study. And there's the cottage bureau. Maple. No, that won't do. A desk? Doesn't someone have a desk they're not using. No, I suppose not."

The doorbell rang and Kathy left reluctantly to answer it. Brenda no longer seemed so terribly important. But later, when the two girls were curled up on the twin beds in Kathy's room, manicuring their nails

in anticipation of the morrow, it was fun to try to imagine what the Swedish boy would be like.

"Daddy says he's nice," Kathy remarked, "but you know grownups. You can't depend on their judgment, actually."

Brenda, who had the blue eyes of a Persian kitten, and fair straight hair cut in a ragged bang, nodded sadly. "My father thinks the dumbest kind of person—Henry Tyson, for instance—is such 'a little gentleman.' "

Her mimicry was enough to send the girls off into a spasm of giggles, from which they recovered only after several relapses. Spurred by such success, Brenda whispered, "Suppose he's simply awful, Kathy? You know, a big Swede with those ears"—she wagged her hands descriptively at the sides of her head—"and feet like tugboats."

"Nobody's feet could be bigger than Jonnie's," Kathy said.

"At least he'll be blond. All Swedes are blond," said Brenda confidently. "What'll you do if he asks you for a date?"

"Oh, Brenda!"

They burst out giggling again, the idea was so ludicrous, but in the midst of their merriment Kathy felt the excitement of the dinner-table announcement wearing thin. Suppose this unexpected visitor did

turn out to be pretty difficult? Would he spoil the happy-go-lucky tenor of the household? Would he treat her like a child, as Jon did? Would he think her mother was flighty and difficult instead of artistic and amusing? Would he expect a room of his own instead of a makeshift bed crowded in with Jon?

A school year could be a long, long, time. There would be the football season, Thanksgiving, Christmas, then the interminable midwinter months before a late New England spring. Sweden must be cold and dark in the winter too, she comforted herself, but still. . . .

"Worried?" Brenda asked.

"A little."

"Don't be. Nobody ever gets you down."

This wasn't quite true, Kathy thought. Jon got her down, especially lately when he kept acting so superior. She liked life to be easy. She liked people to be happy. And she didn't like complications, even unavoidable ones.

Getting up to pull back the curtains and open the window, she stood for a moment, staring at her own reflection in the dark panes. It was an unremarkable face that stared back, rounded and gentle, rather than conspicuously pretty. But the retroussé nose and dark eyes and medium-brown hair with a bend that wasn't quite a curl were comforting, because they were so completely familiar. "I don't want anything to

change," she muttered fiercely. "I wish we didn't have to grow up."

Brenda, who was lying on her back staring at nothing, apparently thought these sentiments beneath her notice. "D'you know any Swedish, Kathy?" she asked.

Kathy turned, her mood broken. "Of course not. Why?"

"Suppose Per doesn't speak English?"

"He will."

"He might not." Brenda chuckled. "Poor Jon."

"We could learn a few words," Kathy proposed. "Daddy has a Swedish pocket dictionary." She slipped her feet into scuffs, the thought of sleep temporarily abandoned. "Wait! I'll go get it now."

CHAPTER

2

At the breakfast table the girls tried out their half-dozen newly acquired Swedish words on Jon.

"*God morgon*," Kathy greeted her brother between giggles, then turned to Brenda. "*Jag är törstig*, aren't you?"

"What are you talking, pig Latin?" Jonathan asked, unamused.

"That's Swedish for 'I am thirsty,'" his sister explained, while Brenda dissolved into helpless laughter and Dr. McCall grinned.

"Dad! You're not going to let her embarrass us by—by—"

"Pass the sugar, please, Kathy. *Tack så mycket*. By what, Jonathan?" Dr. McCall asked.

Jonathan pushed back his chair in indignation. "He'll think we're all a bunch of zombies, that's what he'll think!" A flush stained his neck and crept up to his cheekbones, and he glared at Kathy and Brenda, who had tears of mirth in their eyes, as though he hated them.

With the air of a man pouring oil on troubled waters, Dr. McCall said, "Actually, Per speaks remarkably good English. A trifle British and even bookish by your standards, perhaps, but entirely adequate."

Kathy turned to her friend. "I guess we've wasted our time."

"Not at all," Dr. McCall hastened to assure her. "I'm sure Per will be delighted if you take the trouble to learn a few Swedish phrases. After all, the shoe shouldn't be entirely on one foot."

"There's something wrong with that proverb," Mrs. McCall suggested sleepily as she poured herself a second cup of coffee. "Kathy has two feet and I'm sure Per must have. . . ." Her voice trailed off and she yawned behind a hand. "What time does school actually start? I always forget."

"Nine o'clock, Mother," replied Jon, with excessive patience.

"But we have to be there at quarter of," put in Brenda, and she turned her head slightly to get a bet-

ter angle on her angelic reflection in the mirror over the sideboard.

"I must say you all look very pretty," murmured Mrs. McCall, rising to the occasion.

"Especially Jon," said Dr. McCall, and added wickedly, "I like the way his hair curls behind his ears, don't you?"

This was enough to send the girls off into a new fit of giggles, which lasted, intermittently, until they found themselves walking down the school corridor toward their new home room, and the serious business of making schedules and finding their way from class to class began.

In the next few days Kathy was caught up so completely by the novelty of being in the upper school that any concern regarding the family's prospective house guest was driven from her mind. There were friends to greet, books to get, teachers' names to learn, extra-curricular activities to consider. Should she play hockey or tennis, take art or music appreciation? Would she care to try out for the fall play? Had she bought her series football tickets? Would she be coming to the rally Friday night?

Kathy found herself, as usual, interested in everything and accomplished at nothing in particular. She had little dramatic ability, her voice wasn't of Glee

Club quality, and while she was quite willing to run up and down a hockey field with a stick in her hand she hadn't the necessary speed or aggressiveness to make the varsity.

Brenda, whose pert prettiness and love of histrionics led her to covet the ingénue's part in the play, felt that her best friend should be more enterprising. "You've got to do *something*," she insisted. "What interests you most?"

Her brown eyes thoughtful, her lips pursed, Kathy tried to think. "I'd sort of like to work on the *Orbit*," she admitted. "If it weren't for Jon."

"What does Jonathan have to do with it?"

"He's feature editor, you know. He might think I was trying to horn in."

"Nonsense," Brenda said firmly. "Why should he object?"

Kathy couldn't frame a satisfactory reply, nor could she even analyze her own reluctance to trespass on Jonathan's preserve. It would be fun to have her name appear on the list of editorial assistants. "Well, maybe . . ." she capitulated, and late that afternoon dared to push open the door of the *Orbit* office, at a time she was sure her brother would not be there.

Rad Cooper, however, was sitting at the ancient roll-top desk which some enterprising reporter of a bygone

year had salvaged from a crowded attic. He looked up and said, "Hi, Kathy," without especial surprise.

"Oh," murmured Kathy, already regretting her impulse, "I didn't know you were here."

Rad grinned, his gray-green eyes narrowing, his eyebrows quirking like a satyr's. "I don't bite," he promised. "Come on in."

Kathy eased herself through the door, then stood with her back against it. Though normally not the least self-conscious, she suddenly felt out of her depth. The cluttered desk, the clippings pinned higgledy-piggledy to the bulletin board, but most of all Rad Cooper, leaning back in the battered oak chair and twirling a pencil in his fingers, made this a man's world.

Indeed, Kathy shared her brother's respect for Rad. He was a senior, a consistent honor student, and a big man in the Academy. Under his editorship the *Orbit* had become a really outstanding school newspaper, and he shared with the president of the student government and the chairman of the athletic council a very real prestige in the upper school.

Now, confronting him on his own ground, and quite alone, Kathy was at a loss to explain herself. "I—I just wanted to see what the *Orbit* office was like," she confessed.

Rad's eyes roved from a torn window shade to a deal

table surrounded by chairs, and back to the desk with its litter. "Kind of a dump, but we love it," he said unexpectedly.

"I can see why." Kathy wrinkled her nose and sniffed. "It sort of smells good."

Rad laughed. "It's the aura, not the aroma, of printer's ink," he told Kathy. "Don't tell me you like it too!"

"I might."

"Thinking of coming to work for us?"

"I thought you had plenty of people already," Kathy hedged, but she went over to the table and ran a hand along the edge, almost as she would have stroked a dog. Meanwhile, she didn't meet Rad's glance.

"Always room for one more," Rad assured her. "Why don't you give reporting a try? Anybody who turns in three stories that are printed in the paper automatically gets his—or her—name on the masthead. Jon seems to like it fine. And who knows, ability may run in the McCall family. Or are you planning to be a scientist like your dad?"

"A scientist? Me?" This struck Kathy as really funny, and suddenly she was transfigured by laughter. Her dark eyes glinted with amber lights, her mouth turned up and disclosed two unexpected dimples, and her hair seemed to gather a new shine from the after-

noon sun slanting through the window. "I can't even do my nine-times-tables very well."

Rad chuckled. "Then you'll undoubtedly make out fine as a reporter," he told her. "Seriously, why don't you give it a whirl?"

Kathy looked thoughtful. "If you wouldn't tell Jon." He might tease me, she was thinking, and if I didn't make the grade he'd be more superior than ever.

"I won't breathe a word. Cross my heart and hope to die." Rad smiled. "Though why you should care what that big lug thinks is a mystery to me."

Kathy opened her mouth, then shut it again. It would be impossible to explain her position as Jon's kid sister, especially to a boy like Rad. "Would it be all right if I just sign my initials?" she asked. "Maybe with a fake middle one?"

"K.X.M.?" Rad proposed.

"X for what?"

Rad shrugged. "Xanthippe, Xenophon, Xmas."

"Xanthippe was a shrew," Kathy objected.

Rad looked surprised. "Spoken like a true professor's daughter." He was teasing her, but for the first time it seemed to Kathy that he was also regarding her as a person—a girl—not just as Jon's younger sister.

Suddenly embarrassed, she edged toward the door. "I guess I'd better be going," she said before she

slipped through. Then, as she hurried down the hall she bit her lip angrily, because she knew that she had sounded both abrupt and gauche.

Quite suddenly, Kathy, who had never especially craved approval, wanted Rad to think well of her. All the way home her thoughts kept returning to him, with a new understanding of the hero worship he was accorded by some of his juniors. He had a certain quality, Kathy decided, that was a combination of several things—kindliness, humor, understanding. He also had a clean-cut kind of good looks which made him seem more a man than a boy. It was as though Rad's appearance and personality were branched and formed, rather than growing unevenly like Jonathan's. She felt that he was a person who could be depended upon and trusted, yet at the same time a boy it would be fun to know.

With a twitch of her shoulders Kathy tried to dispel this foolish desire. "Fat chance," she scolded herself, as she shifted her armload of books, which were growing heavier by the moment. Radcliff Cooper was at the top of the upper-school ladder and she was at the bottom, as she very well knew. Wouldn't Jonathan hoot if he could read her thoughts at this very moment! Ah well, she consoled herself, a cat can look at a king.

From the top of the hill where the McCalls lived

there was a sudden, spreading view of Boston. As always, Kathy stopped to look back on the panorama for a moment—at the Charles River snaking along past the Cambridge boathouses, at the John Hancock Building brooding over the business district like a large, square hen, at the tangled streets beyond the several bridges and the green patches indicating the Common and the Public Gardens. A wonderful city, she thought—not pretty exactly, but beckoning and full of life. Beneath the white spires of Harvard and the squat dome of M.I.T. thousands of students were gathered right now, and across the river half a dozen other schools contributed to the bustling intellectual atmosphere. There were theaters and concert halls and museums, sailing clubs and skating rinks and football stadiums. And wrapping the visible Boston like a soft scarf were the lore and romance of Beacon Hill, of the market district, and of the water front where transatlantic liners jostled fishing boats and pleasure craft.

She wondered how her city would affect a stranger—like the Swedish boy who was to come next week, for instance. Was Stockholm so very grand that he would find Boston provincial, or would he see its charm?

All these thoughts were random. They flickered like candles in Kathy's brain and went out before they could be put into words. The moment of reverie was over, and she hurried on, aware now that she was hun-

gry, and hoping there would be something to nibble on in the kitchen, because dinnertime was still two hours away.

The front door, as usual, was unlocked, and she pushed into the hall and dropped her sweater and books on the walnut lowboy beside a bowl filled with September roses from the garden. For a moment she stood still, listening, but the house seemed silent and empty, so she went on out to the kitchen and investigated the refrigerator for any leftover goodies that might be lurking there.

The prospect was disappointing, except for a jug of cider. She poured a glass, unearthed some rather stale cookies from the cupboard, and wandered through the hall again to the living room.

"'Allo," said a strange voice, so suddenly that she whirled around with a start to face the open door. "Is this Professor McCall's house?"

The light in the entry was so dim that while Kathy could hear, she could not see beyond the screen. "Yes, it is," she replied walking slowly forward, aware that both hands were full, and feeling slightly incapacitated.

Then she stopped short. "You must be—"

"Per Hedlund," said the disembodied voice.

"But I thought you weren't coming until next week!"

She didn't mean this to sound like a wail, but her

voice rose uncontrollably on the last word. Here she was, all alone, without any family support whatever, in the difficult position of welcoming her father's protégé.

"I'm very sorry." There was contrition, but also a faint chuckle, in the lad's tone. "Space was available on an earlier plane, and we all thought—"

Kathy suddenly rediscovered her manners. She dumped the cookies and cider glass on top of her schoolbooks and said, "Of course. Won't you come in?"

"I telephoned from the airport, but there was no one at home," the boy apologized, as he lifted two heavy suitcases and brought them into the hall. He straightened, and Kathy could see that he was only middling fair, but very tall. "I decided I'd better just come along out."

"Of course," said Kathy again, and in explanation added, "nobody's ever around here weekday afternoons." She felt ill at ease and quite incapable of playing the proper hostess. If only her mother would come home and rescue her!

But this, as she knew only too well, was out of the question. Art class always lasted until well after five o'clock. Jon was at soccer practice and her father had announced at breakfast that he was going on to the lab

after classes. That meant he'd dash in just in time for dinner. Meanwhile, she was on her own.

"I'm Kathy," she said in the next breath. "Daddy's right. You speak very good English. That's a relief."

Per laughed, and Kathy flushed, aware that she must sound fairly idiotic, but not sure what her next move should be. "I was just having a glass of cider," she hazarded. "Would you like some?"

"Cider?" the Swedish boy repeated questioningly. "What's that?"

"Apple juice," Kathy told him, and seized on the opportunity to escape, at least momentarily. "If you'll just wait here in the living room, I'll get you some." She waved a hand to indicate direction and fled through the kitchen door.

By the time she returned she had acquired at least a surface composure. Per was standing by the windows and at last she could see his face, which was smooth and sober, a serious face with wide-set blue-gray eyes, a generous mouth and a straight, rather short nose. The most noticeable thing about him, however, was his posture. He stood extremely straight, as though he were at military attention, his shoulders square and his head carried high. The suit he was wearing was dark, narrowly striped, and very conservative—it looked like a banker's suit, Kathy thought, more suitable to a middle-aged man than a teen-ager.

If dress and bearing stamped Per as a foreigner, however, the manner in which Per accepted the glass of cider from Kathy put the official seal on their relation to each other. He bowed slightly but unmistakably from the waist. "*Tack så mycket,*" he said gravely, forgetting himself and lapsing into Swedish for the first time.

Kathy was glad that she could understand. "You're welcome," she replied with a smile, and plopped down on the sofa. "I'm sorry if I seemed rude, a few minutes ago. I was just surprised."

Per nodded. "Naturally."

"Won't you sit down?"

The boy perched on the edge of the wing chair, looking taller and more dignified than ever. His glance wandered to the bookcases that lined the white plaster walls, then to the walled garden beyond the casement windows. He looked so baffled that Kathy asked, "This is not what you expected?"

"Not in the least. In America I did not expect to find an English country house," Per admitted.

Kathy laughed. "The Boston suburbs are full of Tudor," she replied. "Leaded glass, baronial fireplaces, and all. It's not fashionable any more, but it's comfortable." She looked around lovingly and hoped that he would not disapprove.

Per's next remark, fortunately, was reassuring.

"This is a very handsome room, like a large library in a way."

Kathy nodded. "But cosier." She was still on the defensive until Per said, "Yes, and such wonderful colors the decorator has used."

"The decorator is my mother," Kathy explained quickly. "She's very artistic. You'll see." There was a pause which Per made no attempt to fill, so she asked, "Do you like the cider?"

"Very much," the boy replied. **U.S. 1191101**

This seemed to bring the conversation to a dead end. Kathy got up, took Per's empty glass, and escaped to the kitchen once more. There she stood in front of the sink wondering what to do next. Should she take Per upstairs to Jon's quarters and show him where he was to live? Chances were that the bear pit, as the family derisively called her brother's room, was in its usual state of disorder. The McCalls had been counting on the coming week end for a thorough clean-up, and if only Per had arrived on schedule, order might have been achieved.

But now? Kathy dared not take the chance. She had a definite premonition that Jon's normal clutter, coupled with a probably unmade bed, would dismay this rather stilted youth. "Maybe Mother can cope," she muttered to herself, "but I certainly can't."

Of immediate concern was the question of how to

fill the next hour. She could ask the usual questions, she supposed. "What kind of flight did you have? Is it cold in Stockholm now?" Even before utterance the routine queries sounded dull, but as Kathy walked softly back across the hall she was at a loss for a more entertaining gambit.

Then, at the top of the shallow steps leading down into the room, she paused, unheard. Per was on his feet again, standing stiffly near the windows, but although his glance was directed toward the spreading beech tree beyond, Kathy could tell that this was merely a pose. He was seeing nothing outside, nothing whatever. His face, exposed and vulnerable in this moment when he thought himself alone, was younger than before, and remarkably appealing. Why, he's frightened, Kathy realized. He's positively terror-stricken. This must be a dozen times more difficult for him than it is for me. After all, I'm on my own home ground!

She coughed slightly, to announce her presence, and Per turned to face her, the mask of wary politeness descending again. But this time Kathy dared to ignore it. She smiled brightly, warmly, and said, straight from her heart, "This must be terribly hard for you, with Mother and Dad not home, and all. I'm sorry I'm not a very good substitute."

"But you are splendid!" Per said, and now he too

sounded genuine. "I was just thinking, in your position I wouldn't know what to do."

Kathy chuckled. "Then we're even. Let's start fresh. And I'd better begin by confessing I don't dare take you up to your room, because you're going to be put in with Jonathan, and he always leaves things in the most awful mess!"

CHAPTER



3

By the time Mrs. McCall breezed into the house, in one hand an oil painting still wet on the canvas, and in the other a bag full of groceries, Kathy had briefed Per, at least superficially, on what to expect.

"We have a zany sort of family," she told him.

"Zany? What's that?"

"Wacky. Funny-peculiar." Per's obvious confusion made her try again. "Erratic, maybe you'd call it."

"I know from my father that Professor McCall is a very brilliant scientist."

"Oh yes, Daddy's bright enough. So are Mother and Jonathan, for that matter. It's just that they won't be what you're expecting, Per, any more than this room is."

"But I told you, I like the room."

"You'll like us, too, when you get used to us," Kathy promised. "We have a lot of fun. But right in the beginning it's apt to be confusing. As Jon would say, just try to roll with the punches. It'll be easier that way."

In spite of this canny advice, Per reverted to type the instant Mrs. McCall entered the room. To Kathy's secret amusement he almost clicked his heels as he bowed over her mother's hand, and his apology for this unexpected arrival was as formal as though he were making a prepared speech in a school assembly.

Mrs. McCall cloaked her surprise in a warm welcome. "We're delighted to have you, the earlier the better!" she assured him. "Has Kathy shown you to your room?" A glance toward her daughter made her backtrack. "No. I guess we'd better wait, hadn't we, until Jon comes home?"

Kathy took the bag of groceries while her mother stood the wet canvas against a bookcase. "What's that supposed to be?"

"An abstraction," Mrs. McCall said, cocking her head and regarding the painting critically. "We're supposed to give things names, so I thought I'd call it the 'Sphinx in Stillness,' after that line of Pasternak's, you know."

Kathy did not know, nor, apparently, did Per. He

made no comment, but after a second Kathy asked, "Where's the sphinx?"

"It's just indicated, darling. See. That triangle." Mrs. McCall waved airily toward a three-cornered blob of green paint. "I got so absorbed the time just *flew!*" Glancing at the little French clock on a side table she gave a slight start. "It's still flying, I guess."

Kathy grinned at Per and raised an eyebrow, then followed her mother to the kitchen and put the groceries on the counter. "Anything I can do?"

"You might peel some potatoes. I wish Richard would come home. Or Jon. Poor dear, he's so very strange."

Following the thought transition with the ease of long practice, Kathy said, in an undertone, "He'll be all right. He's nice, actually."

"Is he? I'm so glad!" Mrs. McCall sounded relieved. "I do wish we'd managed to get the bed moved, though."

"Jon and Daddy can do it after dinner. Don't worry."

"Kathy, you *are* a comfort. Every woman should have at least one daughter. Remember that."

Jonathan, banging the back door behind him, caught only the last two words. "Remember what?" he asked, and dropped a stack of books heavily on the counter top.

Instead of answering, Mrs. McCall cried, "Oh Jon dear, what a blessing!" Then she lowered her voice to a stage whisper. "The Swedish boy's here."

Jonathan gave a low whistle. "Jumped the gun, didn't he?"

In a normal tone, Mrs. McCall suggested, "Come right along in and meet him." Then she whispered, "Straighten your tie, sweetie."

Jon cast his eyes upward as though imploring heaven to help him. "Face it, Mother," he whispered back. "This guy's going to *live* here."

Kathy grinned to herself, and listened to the sounds of introduction, which reached her only in the most fragmentary snatches. She wondered what Per would make of Jonathan, and found herself identifying herself with the Swedish boy, imagining herself in his shoes. This was a game she usually played only when reading a novel, but lately the impulse was expanding to include people in real life.

One thing was sure. Per would find Jon incredibly sloppy, with his rampant hair, his baggy flannels, and the tired summer sneakers he was still wearing to school. But would the newcomer look a little farther and notice the really fine eyes, keen and intelligent? Would he see beneath the unprepossessing surface a person worth cultivating?

Kathy sighed. As for Jon, she hoped he'd be decent,

and not make Per feel any more forlorn than he already was!

A few minutes later her mother reassured her on this point. "Jonathan really rises to an occasion—once in a blue moon!" she confided, as she hurried back to her kitchen tasks. "I think they're going to get along."

Kathy might consider it too soon to tell, or even to discount this statement as her mother's typical optimism, but it quickly became apparent that Jon intended to marshal Per into his camp. He treated the foreign boy as a prestige item, singular enough to be of special interest at the Academy, and even before dinner he phoned Rad to say, "Hey, we ought to get an interview for the next issue of the *Orbit*. How about setting it up for tomorrow night?"

"Really, Daddy, you shouldn't let him *exploit* Per!" Kathy protested, appealing to her father, because he was the only parent within earshot. "He ought to have a little chance to get adjusted. I don't think it's fair!"

Dr. McCall considered the matter. "I think we'd better let nature take its course," he decided, and went outside to look after his orchids, telling Kathy to bring Per along to the greenhouse when he came downstairs.

It was one of the professor's greatest joys to show a

new guest his cypripediums, cattleyas, odontoglossums, and various hybrids; and the admiration he received for his skill in raising orchids pleased him far more than any compliment on his scientific achievements. Kathy intended to inform Per of this fact, but Jon refused to relinquish him to her. "I'll take him on out to Dad," he said, brushing her off.

Kathy shrugged. "It's apparently a man's world," she murmured to her mother, in momentary chagrin.

"At least Jon isn't ignoring the lad. That was the alternate possibility."

By the time Dr. McCall and the two boys came in from the greenhouse, dinner was ready. Candles, flanking a low bowl of pale yellow marigolds, glinted on the walnut table top, and the dining room had acquired an inviting air of welcome. Per, seated between Kathy and her mother, had such polished manners that Jonathan instinctively straightened his back and kept his elbows out of evidence. To Kathy the dinner had an air of unaccustomed formality. Conversation seemed sober and pedantic, and her father's efforts to put Per at ease were more valiant than effective. The Swedish boy's stiffness, everyone realized, would have to wear off gradually. He obviously felt like a fish out of water, a stranger in a strange land.

Meanwhile, fortunately, there were all sorts of arrangements to be made—Jon's quarters to reorganize,

the headmaster of the Academy to be notified of Per's arrival, school routines to be explained, and luggage to be unpacked. The entire family helped, and by bedtime the bear pit had been made fairly presentable. "It's only temporary," Jonathan warned his new roommate, however. "I'm just not the neat type."

Per smiled politely, but Kathy thought he looked very tired. Jet-propelled into the midst of the McCalls as he had been, it was small wonder. She hoped that Jon wouldn't keep him awake talking, and said as much to her mother. But Mrs. McCall just smiled, and murmured, "I think Per will be able to take care of himself."

The next day, in school, Kathy got only a fleeting glimpse of the Swedish boy, when she passed the science lab on the way to study hall. Jonathan shepherded Per from class to class, introducing him to the masters and to his special friends, and making himself extremely helpful.

That Kathy didn't figure in the picture was to be expected, yet in spite of herself she felt left out. When Brenda, bubbling with curiosity, demanded to know what Per was like, Kathy's reply was caustic. "If Jon ever lets him off the leash maybe I can find out."

"He's good-looking," Brenda decided, "in a remote kind of way."

Kathy nodded. "I like him," she said frankly, "even if he is sort of . . . formal."

"You mean grown-up?"

"More than that. Standoffish. I think we scare him."

"How could you?" Brenda asked. But Kathy couldn't explain, although she felt sure she was right.

This was confirmed later in the afternoon, when the two girls chanced upon Per on the school steps, where he was waiting for Jonathan. "Introduce him to me," Brenda whispered, with a demanding nudge, and when Kathy complied she overwhelmed Per with enthusiasm.

"This is terribly nice!" she cried. "We're all delighted you're here."

"Thank you," said Per, with his little bow, but he looked puzzled and a trifle appalled by such effusiveness.

Brenda, however, was unchecked in her effort to be cordial. "Kathy will have to bring you over to our house sometime soon," she hurried on. "We'll arrange a little party or something." Then, reluctantly allowing Kathy to drag her away, she called over her shoulder, "Be seeing you."

Out of earshot, however, she pretended to shiver. "He's a little chilly."

"He's just different," said Kathy defensively. "Give the poor guy a chance."

She wished that she could make the same suggestion to Rad and Jon when they captured Per for the *Orbit* interview that evening. The two American boys plunged headfirst into a torrent of questions. What's your first impression of the U.S.? Do you think our schools are ahead of yours scholastically? How does Boston compare with Stockholm? What field of study are you most interested in?

Pretending to be looking for a reference book, Kathy loitered in the living room on the fringe of the discussion, and listened to Per's slow and labored answers. "About most of these things it is too early to say," he protested. "Wait until I have been here a month or so—until I am—how do you say?—acclimated."

But the boys had to have a story for the *Obit*, as the staff had jokingly nicknamed the paper. "Let's try another tack," Rad suggested. "But what?"

Disregarding Jon's scowl, Kathy came up with a suggestion. "Maybe you could do a piece on school life in Sweden and save Per's impressions of this country for later," she proposed timidly.

"It's a thought," Rad admitted, and turned back to Per. "What do you call a high school in Sweden, anyway?"

"A *realskola*," Per said at once, and sounded relieved that at last he had been asked something he could answer. On firm ground at last, he started to describe

the curriculum, which included so many subjects that Rad wrote them down and then counted them. "Thirteen! All at the same time?" He whistled softly. "And we think we're killed with five!"

"Do you have sports?" Jon put in. "Football, for instance?"

"We play both football and basketball," Per replied, "but we do not have teams."

This required a little probing, and Kathy sank down on a footstool and listened. Apparently interscholastic sports and that special fervor called school spirit were unknown to Per. Before long Rad and Jonathan were answering his questions rather than he theirs, and the tables were completely turned.

"Wait'll you see your first big game. Boy, will you get a boot!" Jon crowed.

"A boot?"

"A kick, a wallop!"

"They mean you'll be excited," Kathy interjected impulsively.

"Before the first game there's always a football dance," Rad explained. "A really large evening with decorations and pep talks and a paid band."

At the mention of a band Per's eyes began to sparkle. "That is one thing," he said, "we like in Sweden—your music. We collect American records—especially dance music. This is very popular."

Rad started to scribble notes on a square of folded yellow paper, and Kathy, to hide a smile, ducked her head over the book she was ostensibly consulting. She could almost guess the headline:

*Swedish Students Prefer
All-American Hit Tunes*

Per's impressions of the Boston area in general and Academy life in particular could wait.

At this point the telephone rang, and Kathy jumped up to answer it. Now that Per was loosening up a little, she felt less anxious concerning the progress of the interview.

"Kathy?" asked the familiar low-keyed boy's voice on the other end of the wire.

"Hi, Steve!"

"Say, did you copy down the history assignment? I had to leave class early."

"Sure. Just a minute. I'll get it." Steve Whitely was an old and good friend. He lived just over the hill and they played tennis summers, and occasionally went to the movies together, or to a party. Kathy wasn't surprised when, after the required information had been duly relayed, Steve asked her if she'd like to go to the football dance with him.

Usually she would have said, "I'd love to," right

away. Steve was a good dancer and fun to be with. But tonight, unaccountably, she hesitated. "This probably sounds silly, but I can't tell you right now, Steve. Can I let you know?"

"You bet," Steve said, but he sounded surprised.

"It's awfully nice of you to ask me," Kathy murmured, feeling that she should sound more appreciative.

"How's Jon making out with his Swede?" the boy asked in passing.

"We," replied Kathy, emphasizing the plural pronoun ever so slightly, "are making out just fine."

"Good-good! See you around."

"I'll phone you in a day or two," Kathy promised. "Off to the wars!"

About to hang up, Steve lingered. "What wars?"

Kathy managed to sigh in the midst of a chuckle. "Have you forgotten the history homework already? The Wars of the Roses, Stephen. To horse and away!"

"Good night, you idiot," said Steve cheerfully.

"By."

Having put the receiver back in its cradle, Kathy sat by the telephone for several minutes, wondering why she hadn't said yes to the dance invitation at once. She wasn't being coy. She and Steve knew one another far too well for any subterfuge. Yet for the next two days she continued to procrastinate, even when Brenda

asked bluntly, "Have you got a date for the football dance?"

"Not exactly."

Brenda, a realist, looked puzzled. "What do you mean, not exactly?"

"Steve asked me—but I haven't said I'd go."

"What are you waiting for—Christmas? Or a knight on a white charger?"

Kathy shook her head. "I don't know. I guess I'd better call him tonight."

"I guess you'd better," Brenda said, then added with a best friend's frankness, "because if you're not interested I can tell you a couple of girls who are—Janet Thomas and Patty Fiske for instance. Steve Whitely is not lacking for fans."

That evening Kathy had actually left her bedroom desk to call Steve when she heard her brother's voice, magnified by the stair well. Leaning over the banisters, she could see him lying flat on his back in the downstairs hall, the telephone balanced on his stomach. His shoes were off, and one white sock had two toes poked through a large hole. These he waved in the air and wiggled casually as he conducted a man-to-man conversation.

"Sure, Rad," he was saying. "Sure, I'll get him fixed up. What do you say to the blonde bombshell? She even looks sort of Swedish. Or maybe he'd go more

for the American type. There's always Jeannie." As though on cue, he started to whistle the chorus of "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair."

"Five more minutes and it's my turn!" called Kathy from the second floor. She was about to return to her desk when a stair creaked behind her, and she turned to encounter Per descending from the bear pit above.

He had obviously overheard the same fragment of conversation, and he looked worried. "Are they talking about me?" he asked.

Kathy nodded. "They're just wondering who you'd like to take to the football dance."

"But I don't know anyone—yet."

"Oh, that's all right," Kathy said encouragingly. "Blind dates can be sort of fun."

Instead of being comforted by this remark, Per looked positively wretched. "I know he means to be kind, but I wish he wouldn't!" Although he spoke barely above a whisper, there was a note of panic in his voice. "You Americans do everything so fast. At home we take things—things like getting to know people—more slowly." He spread his hands in helpless appeal. "Can you understand?" he asked.

"Of course I can," Kathy said sympathetically, although actually she took forthright friendliness for granted. "I'll get Mother to explain to Jonathan. Would you prefer not to go to the dance at all?"

Per paused and seemed to consider. "I'd rather like to go, actually," he admitted, "if I didn't have to be paired off with a stranger." He looked at Kathy thoughtfully. "Why couldn't I take you?"

Laughing spontaneously, Kathy said, "That would send Jon and Rad into convulsions."

"Why?"

"They want to fix you up with somebody older—somebody smooth," Kathy told him. "I'm just Jon's kid sister, don't you see?"

Per shook his head. "I would be more comfortable if I could go with you."

"All right," said Kathy, coming to a sudden decision. She smiled at Per warmly. "It's a date."

"What's a date?" asked Jonathan, who came bounding up the stairs at that moment.

Kathy took a deep breath and presented the situation to him as a *fait accompli*. "Per is going to take me to the football dance."

CHAPTER

4

Jonathan went instantly to his mother. "You can't let her!" he exploded. "She'll ruin everything, that's what she'll do. Per's older. He can't afford to be seen with a girl who—who rides a bicycle to school!"

The bike had long been a bone of contention between Kathy and Jon. "*Nobody* rides a bicycle," her brother insisted, but since she wasn't troubled by a compulsion to conform, Kathy always replied, "I do."

Once again Mrs. McCall repeated patiently, "I think we should let Per make his own decisions." Then suddenly she chuckled. "First Kathy, and now you. Acting like mother hens."

Fortunately Per had gone out to post an airmail letter to his parents, but Kathy could hear this conver-

sation quite distinctly. Rarely, in the McCall household, did anyone trouble to lower his voice.

"Frankly," came Dr. McCall's deeper baritone, "I think we're all guilty of rushing the lad along too fast. Sweden is a more leisurely country than ours."

Kathy, listening from the stair landing, nodded to herself. This was repeating what Per had just said. But Jonathan seized on a single word. "Rushing. It's Kathy who's doing the rushing. Wangling a date! Why would Per want to take a little kid like her anywhere?"

This was too much. Kathy hurried indignantly down to the living room. "I'll have you know, Jonathan McCall," she cried, "I already have another perfectly good invitation to this dance. I'm just doing this out of the goodness of my heart!"

"I believe she is, too," said her mother thoughtfully.

"No matter who's doing what, I suggest you stop it." Dr. McCall's tone was stern and his advice was good, yet it solved nothing. The rift between Kathy and Jonathan widened perceptibly, and the fourteen months between their ages became a chasm that neither tried to leap.

Kathy felt deeply wronged. She didn't break her date with Per, but she did telephone Steve regretfully, and promised herself that from now on she'd stick with her own crowd. Before the family she was cool but

polite to her brother, who in turn treated her with almost unbearable condescension.

At the dinner table Jon took pains to discuss matters of intellectual import which would be over his sister's head. And, true enough, Kathy didn't care whether Citizen Tom Paine had been an early Communist or whether T. S. Eliot's obscurity was due to design or instinct. She listened idly to the discussions which Jonathan triggered between his father and Per, without feeling any desire to participate. And she was aware that this made Jon feel his point was proven—that she was still in the “little kid” category.

Meanwhile, a few leaves turned from green to gold, the chrysanthemum buds began to show color, and the pace at school quickened. Kathy wrote her first article for the *Orbit*, a report on a girl's hockey game with a team from Concord, signed it with the initials K.X.M., and dropped it surreptitiously on Rad's desk. When the first issue appeared a few days later, it had a spot on an inside page, but the interview with Per was played up in a two-column position on page one.

It was a good interview, Kathy had to admit, and it increased Per's prestige enormously. Girls she scarcely knew came up to Kathy in the hall and asked all sorts of questions about the Swedish boy, while her good friends were outspokenly envious.

“I think he's so distinguished-looking,” Janet

Thomas wrote in a note she passed across study hall. "But when I try to talk to him, he's a little standoffish. What is he like at home?"

Brenda kept repeating, "I think you're so *lucky*," and Kathy found it hard to convince her that actually she and Per saw very little of each other. Sports occupied the late afternoon, with the boys reaching home barely half an hour before dinner. Then homework crowded their evenings, because college aptitude tests were being given to all juniors in October, and the pressure on the Fifth Formers was great.

Per often worked later than Jon, because English naturally presented a handicap. One night, coming down to the kitchen for a glass of milk, he discovered Kathy raiding the icebox, and admitted that he had never spent so much time on studies before.

"Wasn't your school in Sweden as hard, then?"

"It was different. Shorter periods for classes, much less discussion. I can't get used to the way you all argue with your teachers. It embarrasses me."

Kathy grinned. "But it's fun, actually. And it teaches people to express themselves."

"It is difficult for me to state my opinion in front of a group," Per admitted. "At home I wouldn't be asked for it."

"Which system do you like better?"

Per took a sip of milk thoughtfully. "I'm not sure.

They both have their strong points. In Sweden maybe we learn more, but over here with all your wonderful equipment and up-to-date books you have a chance to develop really fast. If only—”

“If only what?”

Per frowned. “It seems to me there’s a certain number of pupils in my classes who think it’s smart to appear stupid.”

Kathy looked up from buttering a slice of bread. “I wouldn’t be a bit surprised.”

“But why? Why do they look down upon the boys who may be real scholars?” Per seemed sincerely puzzled.

“It’s hard to explain,” said Kathy slowly, “but I think it’s mixed up with athletics and he-man stuff generally. Get a reputation for being a grind and it sticks with you. That isn’t good.”

“But why isn’t it good? What’s wrong with wanting to be an intellectual?” Then, as though this should clinch matters, Per added, “Jonathan’s certainly interested in improving his mind!”

Kathy nodded, smiling. “This is a new phase, though. Last year Jon couldn’t have cared less.”

The Swedish boy rinsed out his milk glass with a sigh. “It will take me a long time to understand American young people,” he said.

Left alone once more, Kathy sat on a stool and fin-

ished her bread and apple butter without hurrying. It will take Americans a long time to understand Per, too, she was thinking. He's so earnest, so serious, so grown-up compared to most of Jon's friends. Why, he even seems older than Rad—and Rad's a senior. If only he could loosen up a bit!

This led her to a certain natural concern about the football dance. It occurred to her that not only had she never danced with Per, she had never even seen him dance. Suppose he did all sorts of steps she didn't know? Suppose he held himself like a poker, and looked as stiff as he sometimes sounded? Suppose they stumbled all over each other's feet and she was stuck with him all evening? The prestige Per had acquired through Jon's article could turn sour very quickly if he proved to be a dead loss at a party. The kids at the Academy, generally speaking, were the easygoing, fun-loving type.

Kathy, who was not normally given to worry, felt a mounting uneasiness. During the three days before the dance she was moody and irritable, unable to confide her fears even to her mother, but devoutly wishing she had good old dependable Steve for a date.

Maybe, she thought hopefully, I'll get a case of grippe or something. She even courted a convenient ailment by refusing to put on a sweater after sports.

But her health remained excellent, the Friday eve-

ning of the dance inexorably approached, and the gym was decked out in bunting and banners. Per seemed quite unaware that Kathy was at all nervous about the situation. He ate a hearty dinner, entered into a lively discussion on the Nobel Prize awards with the elder McCalls and Jonathan, and seemed in calm good spirits, as though this were any normal Friday night.

Kathy, on the other hand, merely picked at her food. "You didn't eat a thing, dear!" her mother protested, as they cleared the table together. Then she looked at her daughter suspiciously. "I forgot. Tonight's the dance."

Taut to the snapping point, Kathy asked, "What's the dance got to do with it?"

Mrs. McCall shrugged. "I was always edgy as a chipmunk before a party, when I was your age."

This remark didn't help to ease the tension. "Times have changed," Kathy muttered defensively.

Her mother didn't pursue the matter, but a little later, when Kathy was dressing, she opened the bedroom door a crack. "Anything I can do?"

"You might zip me up." Actually, Kathy craved her mother's company. She needed more self-confidence than she could muster, and her mother's quick "Pretty!" was a boon.

"You don't think this dress is too tight?"

Mrs. McCall, standing off to examine the full-

skirted green challis critically, shook her head. "Last spring it was too loose."

Kathy let out a sigh that released some of her pent-up agitation. "Which do you think, the pearls or the crystals?"

"I like the way the crystals sparkle in the electric light," her mother said.

With an instinctive rebellion she couldn't account for, and which made her a little ashamed, Kathy immediately chose the pearls. Then she stood in front of the mirror and brushed her already shining hair once again, tying it back with a smooth green velvet band which exactly matched the dress.

Mrs. McCall sank down on the bed, dropped her chin on one palm, and watched, a tender expression in her eyes. "I do hope you have a good time with Per," she murmured after a few minutes.

Revolt surged once more in Kathy. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, it could be rather difficult. He's strange. And foreign. Just at first, I mean."

"Don't worry, Mother, I'll make out."

"Oh, I'm sure you will, dear! It's just that. . . . I'd be jittery," Annette confessed.

Kathy's hands, cold and trembling slightly, contradicted her reply. "Kids today take things easier."

Per was waiting in the living room when she went

downstairs. He had on a fresh white shirt and his banker's suit, and his shoes were polished until they shone. To Kathy he looked uncomfortably prim and proper. She longed to pull his tie askew or ruffle his smoothly brushed hair, but instead she forced a conventional smile and said, rather abruptly, "I'm ready if you are."

The boy nodded, but turned to a table behind him and picked up a twist of florist's wax paper from which two yellow rosebuds emerged. Blossoming on stems fully a foot long, they were fresh and fragrant and a complete surprise to Kathy, who accepted them gingerly.

"Why, Per," she stammered. "How—how nice!"

Actually, however, she was weak and panicky with confusion. To give herself time she sniffed the perfume of the flowers and wondered what to do? This was no corsage, to be tied by a ribbon on her wrist. The mere prospect of the thorns biting into her flesh and the stems stiff in mid-air made her want to burst into giggles.

But Per, on the other hand, seemed pleased with his gift. Smiling in self-satisfaction, he said confidentially, "My mother would be proud of me. At home she always has to remind me of the etiquette."

Familiar footsteps in the hall gave Kathy renewed

courage. "Mother," she called, "come and see what Per has brought me! Aren't they beautiful?"

"Lovely!" Mrs. McCall said promptly. If she, too, was surprised she concealed it tactfully. "A pin! Come on out to the kitchen, dear. We'll have to cut the stems, I'm afraid."

Wonderful, wonderful, understanding Mother! Kathy followed her like a puppy rescued from drowning, and only when the door was shut behind her did she dare to whisper, "Won't they look queer?"

Mrs. McCall shook her head. "You can't offend him," she whispered. "And they're a perfect color for your dress." Ruthlessly she snipped the stems to a length of two inches and pinned them against the green wool.

As Kathy and her mother returned to the hall, Jonathan clattered downstairs. He had a trench coat over his shoulders and his tie was a limp string, but he was bursting with arrogance. "'By, Mom," he called to his mother. "Be seein' ya, cradle snatcher!" he mumbled to Per.

To Kathy, whose roses he didn't notice, he said not a word.

CHAPTER

5

The gym, discreetly lighted, was vibrating with people. Decorated in harvest colors, it seemed to Kathy to have an air of bewitchment, although Halloween was still a month away. The band was playing second fiddle to the crowd, and Per looked as though he found the situation positively frightening.

"It's a crush, isn't it?" Kathy asked.

"Rath-er!" The Swedish boy used a British accent for emphasis.

"Never mind," said Kathy, in an effort to be comforting. "Chin up high. Here we go!"

She led the way through the throng, disappeared for a moment to drop her coat in the girls' locker room, and returned to rescue Per.

He looked relieved that she hadn't lingered. "Do you really think there's room for us to dance too?"

"Chicken?" Kathy's eyes twinkled.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Sorry," Kathy apologized, as they moved out on the floor. "I always forget you don't understand American slang."

"You could explain."

"I could clue you in," she teased him.

Per looked puzzled. "Perhaps it is beyond me," he admitted with a shy smile. Per was a good dancer, smooth and more relaxed than she might have suspected, with a sense of rhythm that made him a joy to follow. She smiled and didn't try to talk until the music stopped.

"Still have claustrophobia?" she queried.

Per shook his head. "You give me confidence."

Kathy laughed. "I'm glad," she said warmly, no longer concerned about the evening. Per's need for reassurance was quickly putting her at ease. She felt gay and cheerful, quite able to cope with the situation, and indifferent to Jon's hostility. Even the two yellow roses seemed sweet and charming rather than peculiar. What a relief that Per could really dance!

It took barely fifteen minutes for half a dozen clever girls to become aware that something new had been added. Kathy, conscious that heads began to turn and

eyes grew calculating, wasn't in the least surprised when Brenda, breathless in her anxiety to be the first, appeared with her escort to suggest an exchange of partners.

Buzz Campbell, who had been in Jon's class since kindergarten days, looked baffled as he watched the two float away. "How come you're here with the belle of the ball?" he asked Kathy with some asperity.

"Beau of the ball," Kathy corrected him.

"Huh?"

"Beau. B-e-a-u. Per's staying with us for the winter. You should read the *Orbit* once in a while."

"Look, doll, I'm playing football. Remember? A guy can't read too."

Kathy giggled. "Per and you should really get to know each other," she suggested impishly. "You have so much in common."

"I think you're kidding," Buzz murmured, but he looked pleased. When he returned Kathy to the Swedish boy he made a special effort and said, "Great havin' you around!"

Carla Standish, a willowy girl on the dance committee, with dark Spanish eyes and blue-black hair, came up to Kathy and Per with the captain of the varsity football team in tow. "I think it's time the distinguished foreigner in our midst was introduced to me," she suggested in a manner too polished to be natural.

Per made his usual polite bow, and moments later Kathy found herself being propelled around the floor by a new partner, who apparently believed that vigor made up for lack of invention. It was when she was in Sam Carr's arms that Kathy happened to encounter Jon.

He was dancing with Liz Compton, and when he saw his younger sister with Sam, who was a Sixth Former and his acknowledged superior, he looked as though he couldn't believe his eyes. Although Kathy wasn't finding her present assignment exactly a breeze, she managed to smile blandly, and hoped that she looked like a kitten with a saucer of cream. Certainly it was a moment of triumph which she could relish, and Jon's astonishment repaid her for a number of past slights.

She was glad her brother couldn't see the relief with which Sam returned her to Per at the end of the number, but it was neither a surprise nor a great disappointment to Kathy to discover that she was obviously not the football hero's type.

Per danced her away rather loosely. "Whew," he whispered when they were out of earshot, "that was an experience. I felt quite out of my depth."

"Me too," Kathy chuckled. "How does it feel to be popular?"

"But it is not me!" Per insisted. "It is you."

"Don't be an ostrich," Kathy advised him tersely. "You are getting the big rush from all the right people. I'm just going along for the ride."

"But you are enjoying yourself?" Per inquired anxiously.

"Oh yes, I'm enjoying myself."

This was true. By and large, it was quite a pleasant ride, amusing because it was unexpected. And while Kathy suffered no delusion that through Per she would be catapulted into the limelight, she was having a good time. And it was great fun to see the Swedish boy's personality blossom under the attention he was receiving from one attractive girl after another. If the boys who danced with Kathy briefly were unimpressed she wasn't bothered. This was Per's evening—and it was fine with her!

At about ten-thirty there was a break for refreshments, and a pep talk from the chairman of the Athletic Council. Sam and his teammates were lined up, grinning, and were applauded by the loyal students who would be rooting on the side lines at tomorrow's game.

Rad Cooper, who happened to be standing at Per's elbow during the cheering, turned and said, "Well, this is it, boy! The real McCoy."

"He means this is the way we act in American schools," Kathy translated.

"Hi there!" Rad laughed. "What are you doing? Playing official interpreter?"

But Per grinned down at Kathy and squeezed her arm under his elbow. "*Tack så mycket*," he said.

"Unfair!" Rad cried. "Talk English or I won't play!"

At this Patty Fiske, his date for the evening, cut in. "You can teach *me* Swedish if you like, Per. Only you have to ask me to dance first."

Again the slight bow, the change of partners—but this time Kathy felt a quickening sense of excitement. Never before had she danced with Rad!

For the first few minutes they moved to the rather slow music without speaking. Rad seemed to have nothing to say, and Kathy couldn't think of anything sufficiently clever to use as an opening gambit. Just when the silence was becoming a trifle strained, Rad chuckled. "Well, you really got Per launched," he murmured into his partner's ear.

Kathy looked up and smiled. "I'm so glad he's having a good time. I was worried, sort of."

Rad glanced toward Per's smooth head, bent attentively above Patty's curls. "Your worries are over, pet. The champagne bottle has been broken, the ways are empty, and the proud ship Per Hedlund is sliding gracefully out to sea. A splendid sight!"

Kathy, her eyes bright with amusement, laughed softly. "I love the way you say things, Rad."

The remark slipped out so unexpectedly that she didn't realize it might have sounded exaggerated, but suddenly, self-consciously, Kathy blushed and drew back stiffening instinctively.

Rad, far from annoyed, tightened his grasp around his partner's waist and grinned down at her. "Do you, little one? Then please don't act as though it's a sin to pay a person a compliment. I'm quite flattered, you know."

Was he teasing—or was he serious? Kathy couldn't tell, and somehow the memory of Jon's scoffing intruded upon Rad's approval. She ducked her head and danced jerkily, stumbling a little because the music seemed to make no sense.

"Kathy—"

"Mm-hm?"

"Kathy, relax, please!"

She tried, but longed for the band to stop playing, so that she could escape.

Ah, at last it was over, but then Rad did a totally unexpected thing. He squeezed her hand and said, very gently, "Never mind. You're going to be a perfectly enchanting woman some day!"

CHAPTER

6

Skidding and slipping on a muddy field, the Academy's team lost the football game the next day. Per didn't share the general disappointment. Indeed, he seemed rather relieved that there would be no victory celebration. "I think foreigners should be given American school spirit in small doses," he admitted to Dr. McCall that evening.

"Sh! This is heresy. In Boston witches have been hanged for less," the professor warned him.

Kathy giggled. She loved family nonsense like this. But Jon looked thoroughly disapproving. "It's O.K. to make jokes about school spirit around here," he told Per promptly, "but at the Academy I'd be careful. You don't want to get a reputation as an odd ball."

Dr. McCall raised an eyebrow. " 'Speak the language of the company that you are in; speak it purely, and unlarded with any other.' I quote."

"Whom?" asked Mrs. McCall.

"Lord Chesterfield, dear."

"Goodness, Per! That means you'll have to learn American slang."

"I've been trying to teach him," Kathy remarked.

"She has," Per replied with a smile, "but I still think Berlitz School should provide evening courses."

Mrs. McCall clapped her hands. "A wonderful idea! Imagine all our exchange students going back home with phrases like 'dig me' and 'party-poo-per' on the tips of their tongues!"

The Swedish boy looked so horrified that everyone burst out laughing, and he joined in sheepishly. Another month, and he'll be part of the family, Kathy thought to herself. He's coming along rapidly.

Jon sneezed and got to his feet. "I've got a sore throat," he announced.

"Try aspirin—two," murmured Mrs. McCall. "No wonder. Standing around in the rain."

"I've also got a history paper due Monday," added Jon, with an air of self-importance. "Two thousand words on freedom of the will."

"Does aspirin help freedom of the will, Mother?" asked Kathy.

With a withering glance Jonathan tried to quell his younger sister. "Don't be gross," he advised.

Aspirin, as it turned out, proved a specific for neither. By Monday morning it was quite evident that Jon had a full-fledged case of grippe. The doctor was summoned and Per was detailed to announce Jon's indisposition at school and bring home his assignments, because it was the Academy's firm belief that, short of being prostrated by double pneumonia, a teen-ager could work in bed.

Kathy was openly envious. She was especially sleepy, having stayed up to look at a Sunday-night television show, and Jon appeared comfortable and cared-for, propped up on his pillows. But her brother railed against fate. He scribbled a note to be left in the *Orbit* office and acted as though his absence for even a day would be a bitter loss.

"Don't worry," Kathy advised blithely. "I think Rad will be able to muddle through without you." But Jon only glared.

She delivered the note along with her second story for the paper, a brief notice concerning the expanding membership of the Academy's Chess Club, which had somehow managed to acquire a challenge ladder of twenty players and was arranging for the top five to compete with other schools. Rad, who was sitting on the table chatting with one of the reporters, accepted

it casually, but he whistled when he read Jonathan's note.

"I hope he's back by Wednesday," he said. "We need a page one feature, and the *Orbit* has to be put to bed that night."

"Oh, I'm sure he will be," Kathy said optimistically, but as it turned out, Jon's temperature went up instead of down, and by the next morning it became apparent that he would probably be confined to the house for at least two more days.

She admitted this to Rad reluctantly, and added, rather timidly, "Maybe I could scare up some sort of yarn."

"Go to it!" Rad proposed, with the air of a man snatching at a straw. "But remember, we haven't got much time."

For the rest of the day Kathy racked her brains. She could do a story on Per and American slang that would be funny, but unfortunately it would be a dead give-away, besides being rather unfair to their house guest, who was making much admirable progress in adjusting to school life at the Academy. There might be some interest in a piece on Harvard Square coffee houses, which were said to be attracting not only university students to their *espresso* machines, but also some of the older nonconformists in the high-school crowd. This was a really good idea, Kathy thought, but it

would take time to explore. She'd have to find a willing escort, an evening free from homework, and the courage to enter the shabby Bohemian gathering places, where she was bound to look like a fish out of water—too conventional and too young.

Yet it was important to help Rad out! Although she didn't probe her subconscious for reasons, Rad Cooper and not the *Orbit* came first in Kathy's mind. During her one free period she got excused from study hall and prowled the halls, hoping to uncover something of note, but a feature story seemed as elusive as a pheasant on the first day of gunning season. Nothing spectacular or even amusing seemed to be happening at the Academy this week.

She was walking home alone, still pondering the problem, when Steve Whitely caught up with her. "What gives?" he wanted to know. "You look depressed."

"I'm not," Kathy fibbed, "but if you know anything of life or death interest happening at school I wish you'd tell me. Jon's in bed with the grippe and the *Orbit* needs a feature story."

Steve shifted his books and pulled his left ear thoughtfully. "My turtle just died," he said after a minute or two.

"Oh, Steve, be sensible!"

"Well, you mentioned death, and he was quite a

sturdy turtle. I never expected him to turn up his toes this early in the game."

"Stop talking in riddles," Kathy suggested with a yawn, because she wasn't especially interested, and resented the distraction. "What game?"

"It isn't a game, exactly," Steve admitted. "It's an experiment we're doing in science. We've got these fifteen turtles in the lab—fourteen now—and we're trying to find out how long they can go without Vitamin C."

"You mean you're *starving* them?" Kathy sounded horrified.

"Look, it isn't any worse than the dog in Sputnik, or guinea pigs or white mice or—or—" Steve stopped, realizing he was up against the feminine approach to life. "It's all in the interests of science, I mean."

"I don't care. I think it's dreadful." Kathy walked along in silence for a few minutes. "How long did yours live?"

"Somerset? That was his name," Steve explained. "Only about eleven days, actually. Something else must have been wrong. We're going to do an autopsy tomorrow and find out."

Kathy shuddered. "I'm glad I'm not taking science," she said firmly. "I think you're a bunch of—of ghouls!"

Steve sighed, but gave up trying to explain that the

experiment was basically important to the course of study they were pursuing. He left Kathy at the next corner, where their roads parted, and never dreamed that she kept mulling over the conversation the rest of the way home.

But that evening, after her English and French assignments were finished, she borrowed her father's portable typewriter and took it up to her bedroom, shutting the door against intrusion. Then, having inserted a clean white sheet of paper, she sat and considered its surface with her chin in her hands.

"The fifteen neediest cases at the Academy will not survive until Christmas, or even Thanksgiving," Kathy wrote, after about ten minutes. "If we are to save their lives, the time is now!

"It isn't important to the embryo scientists who are conducting their fiendish experiments in the second-floor laboratory that Tillie the Turtle and thirteen unlucky companions are literally starving to death.

"The experiment, they say, is being conducted in the interests of a larger cause. But if you—or you—or you—were locked in a cage and denied food or water in order that a race of giants might examine the effect of starvation on your gastric juices, would you consider it just?

"Hard-shelled though they are, even turtles are unable to survive such lethal treatment, and the first of

their number, derisively nicknamed Somerset by his unfeeling jailor, has already succumbed."

There was more, much more. It was a spoof on all the sob-sister newspaper stories Kathy had ever read, but it contained more than a hint of real feeling.

She did feel sorry for the turtles, so she managed to convey the impression that they were dying in agony. Dachau or any of the other infamous German prison camps had nothing on the second-floor lab!

Rewriting, she polished the piece to make it sound even more sensational. The cause of the turtles became a crusade, and she condemned the experiment categorically. As a final teaser she ended the story with a question. "What fate is worse than death?"

Satisfied at last, she folded the two typed pages and tucked them in the back of her French reader. Now she could fulfill her promise. Although it might not be quite what he expected, she had her story for Rad!

Kathy slept dreamlessly, like a baby, and set out for school Wednesday morning with a pleasant feeling of accomplishment. Jon's temperature still hovered at the hundred mark on the thermometer, but he was feeling better and even seemed resigned to spending the rest of the week at home.

It was afternoon before Kathy had a chance to deliver her feature to the *Orbit* office. She found it empty, so she anchored the folded pages under the

paperweight on Rad's desk, knowing the initials K.X.M. would identify it as hers. No sooner was the story out of her hands than she began to have qualms. Maybe it was too silly. Maybe they had already found another feature. Maybe—

She always ended with an optimistic *maybe*. Maybe Rad would find it amusing and print it, and thus ensure her a position on the staff of the *Orbit*, with her name among the editorial assistants, for all the school—and especially for Jonathan McCall—to see.

Thursday dragged. Kathy knew that the editor-in-chief and his top assistants always had to do final proof-reading and checking at the printer's, but she felt as though she could scarcely bear the suspense until Friday noon, when the *Orbit* was always delivered to the student subscribers before lunch. She wondered if Jon had heard anything from Rad, and even paid a visit to the bear pit, hoping—indirectly—to find out.

But her brother, tired of a diet of fruit juice and homework, seemed to have forgotten that the school paper existed. He was occupied by some ancient oil paints and a rather sticky canvas, and when Kathy inquired what he was doing he said, almost affably, "Making a birthday present for Mom."

"What's it supposed to be?"

"An exercise in abstract planes," replied Jon promptly.

"Why?"

Jon shrugged, and began painting an orange square against a lopsided pink rectangle. "I've got another possible title: 'The Effect of Symmetry on Dissonance.' "

"You're talking nonsense and you know it," Kathy fumed.

Jon put down his brush and glared at his sister. "Who are you to say? Look at Picasso. Look at Paul Klee. Look, for that matter, at Mondrian or Braque or Mr. Luria."

"What's Mr. Luria got to do with it?" Kathy clutched at the name of the Academy's art teacher as at a straw.

"He believes in the vitality of equilibrium," said Jonathan, without cracking a smile.

Kathy gave up and went downstairs again, where her father was sorting through some orchid lists trying to find out when *Cypripedium Maudiae* came into bloom. "Jon's getting more impossible by the day," she announced firmly.

Dr. McCall looked up. "Be patient, dear," he advised. "All men are bears when they are sick."

After a few minutes he started out to the greenhouse and Kathy tagged along, craving companionship and conversation that was mildly reasonable. She walked between the benches, soothed by the moist, sweet-

scented air, and allowed her father to show her the dozen orchid plants presently in flower, the cymbidiums in spike, and the wonderful aerial roots on a collection of terete Vandas.

As usual, after this conducted tour, Dr. McCall ignored Kathy's presence completely, and went about the business of dividing and repotting some newly acquired orchid pseudobulbs in fir bark. His hands were quick and efficient and he whistled while he worked. Kathy, meanwhile, sank down on the single stool the greenhouse boasted, and gave herself up to thought.

"Daddy," she asked after a while, "when did you decide you wanted to be a scientist?"

"When I was a sophomore in college."

"Not till then?"

"Nope. I thought I wanted to be a farmer when I was your age. An experimental farmer, you understand."

Kathy smiled. "Do you think many people know—earlier?"

"Some," said Dr. McCall, as he reached for another pot. "The lucky ones."

"What about Jon?"

"I don't know about Jon yet. And I don't think he does either. He's just feeling his way, but sometime or other he'll catch fire, and then—"

He left the sentence unfinished, but there was an

upward inflection on the last word which bespoke his hopes for his son. Kathy, who had been trying to bring the conversation around to herself, decided against it. "I guess I'd better go start my homework," she murmured, and got up from the stool with a sigh.

The telephone was ringing when she entered the hall and she ran to answer it, hoping—foolishly, she knew—that it was Rad. But instead it was Brenda's cheerful voice, asking if they could get together and study for Friday's French quiz.

Kathy, who had forgotten all about it, was quick to agree. "Sure. I'll come over to your house," she said at once, and only after hanging up did she realize that there had been a faint note of annoyance in Brenda's assent. Even so, it never occurred to Kathy that the McCall house might be more attractive because of the presence of the two boys.

Per, as Kathy had foreseen, was settling into the family routine—or lack of routine—so thoroughly that he no longer seemed a stranger. In fact, it was a good deal like having two older brothers in the house instead of one. During Jon's illness, for safety's sake, he had moved down to the guest room, where he studied late at night, turning off his light long after the rest of the family were in bed.

Noticing the circles under his eyes one morning,

Mrs. McCall took him to task. "You're staying up too late, Per. All work and no play—it isn't good."

But as usual Per turned off the criticism with a smile. "Wait until I become more accustomed to studying in English," he begged.

Kathy, with the French test looming large in her mind, was especially sympathetic. "Mother dear!" she protested. "Think what it would be like to take every course in a foreign language. Why, even Daddy would flunk!"

"Not in German, I wouldn't."

Kathy was dubious, and looked it. "You never speak German around here."

"*Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten,*" answered Dr. McCall quickly.

"What does that mean?"

"It means you don't have the proper respect for my accomplishments," the professor replied, and grinned at Per.

Kathy was in no mood to be teased. She went off to school apprehensively, wishing she was more certain of the irregular verbs.

In fact, the French test so effectively drove everything else from her mind that after it was over she almost bumped into Rad without recognizing him.

He was coming down the hall with a stack of *Orbits* cradled in one arm, and he thrust a paper into Kathy's

hand. "You're in, kid," he said. "That was a very funny story you left on my desk."

"You *used* it?" Kathy felt unexpectedly fluttery inside.

"Page one. Hope the scientists don't get huffy, but I couldn't resist it. Kathy, you can write!"

This would have been high praise from anyone, but from Rad it was positively towering. As he hurried on down the hall Kathy looked after him in ardent appreciation, then quickly turned to the masthead. There was her name, sure enough! She could scarcely wait until Jonathan discovered it among the editorial assistants: Kathleen McCall!

Then she returned to the first page and the story—her story! Rad's two-column head was descriptive: "Sad Plight of Starving Turtles Touches *Orbit* Reporter's Heart."

Under it, instead of the initials agreed upon, was her full name—a by-line, Kathy realized in delighted surprise. A compliment from Rad!

She went down to the lunchroom feeling warmed by Rad's praise, and full of new confidence. It was going to be great fun being a working member of the *Orbit* staff!

The crowd of girls with whom Kathy usually lunched added to her sense of well-being by reading sections of the article aloud and laughing over its ab-

surdity. "I didn't dream you were so clever!" admitted Brenda, with the half-envious surprise of a close friend.

All afternoon Kathy basked in a pleasant aura of acclaim. It was her first modest taste of success, and she enjoyed every minute of it, although the climax would not be reached until she could get a copy of the paper into her brother's hands.

Hurrying home from school, she chuckled to herself, picturing his incredulity when he discovered her by-line, rehearsing the offhand manner in which she would mention her new position on the staff. Two copies of the *Orbit* were tucked neatly between the pages of her loose-leaf notebook. One she planned to leave in the living room, and the other she would take upstairs when she delivered Jon's assignment sheet.

The invalid, however, was up and dressed when Kathy arrived at the house. He looked a trifle pale, and his hair was shaggier than ever, but otherwise he seemed completely himself.

"Hi," he said, the minute his sister walked into the hall. "You've had a couple of telephone calls. No names."

"Thanks," said Kathy. "How are you feeling?"

"O.K."

"Going back to school Monday?"

"Natch."

“Well, that’s good. I brought your assignments—and an *Orbit*.” Kathy handed him both.

To her disappointment he glared at the assignments and ignored the *Orbit* completely, leaving it folded under the typewritten sheet. He carried them both off upstairs without comment, leaving Kathy, with victory still untasted, feeling a little let down.

CHAPTER

7

Five minutes later, with a yelp which sounded throughout the house, Jonathan clattered down the two flights of stairs to accost his sister in the kitchen, where she was helping herself to a dish of applesauce.

“For Pete’s sake!” he cried. “Are you out of your mind?”

Since he had the copy of the *Orbit* in his hand, it was perfectly clear that he was referring to the feature story, but his reaction was so unexpected that Kathy froze, the serving spoon in mid-air. Cold, implacable fury at her brother stung her as never before. How dare he spoil her moment of triumph? How dare he! She searched for the most demeaning retort she could possibly make and found it.

"Sour grapes?"

Jonathan, thumping the paper with extended fingers, seemed not even to have heard her. "Look, I took this course last year," he groaned. "The angle you've used simply isn't true. They don't starve turtles; they just withhold vitamins."

This seemed a very fine point of ethics to Kathy. "Steve's died," she said coldly.

Jonathan clapped a hand to his head and groaned afresh. "So that's it. One turtle happened to die. And you build a story on it. I'll bet you never even bothered checking with the lab."

This punctured Kathy's armor for the first time, but she rallied. "So what?" she asked.

"So," said her brother with emphasis, "you might get us into serious trouble."

At this Kathy dared to laugh. "Phooey," she said shortly. "Rad saw fit to run the story, didn't he? You're just jealous." Turning on her heel, she abandoned the applesauce and marched out of the room.

She had scarcely arrived in the hall, however, when the telephone rang again, and Kathy lifted the receiver with a feeling of trepidation creeping in upon her anger. Rad's worried voice came over the wire. "Say, Kathy, that turtle story seems to have got us into a bit of a jam. Is Jonathan there?"

It was impossible to face the immediate prospect of

turning over the receiver to her brother. Dodging the final question, Kathy stalled for time. "What's wrong?"

"Mr. Walters contends you didn't get your facts straight. Who told you this yarn?"

Instinctively, Kathy felt she should protect Steve. "A boy I know," she countered. "Anyway, it was just nonsense. Why should anybody take it seriously?"

There was a moment's deliberation. Then Rad said, "In a newspaper even nonsense has to be based on fact. I knew that. I should have checked your sources." His voice changed, rising an octave to indicate encouragement. "Don't worry, Kathy. It's probably just a tempest in a teapot. But even so, I think I'd better talk things over with Jon."

On Monday morning, after a blowy late October week end, the tempest in the teapot became a very dark brew indeed. A delegation from a suburban chapter of the Animal Cruelty Prevention Society called on the headmaster of the Academy, with a request to visit the science laboratory at once.

Here they gave Mr. Walters a piece of their collective mind, ignoring his protests that the story was unfortunately slanted, and demanded that the unfortunate turtles be supplied with all the proper vitamins at once.

Rad, as editor-in-chief of the *Orbit*, Jonathan as feature editor, and Kathy as the real culprit, were all invited to meet at noon in the headmaster's office, and here Mr. Walters expressed in no uncertain terms his embarrassment and deep regret that such a contre-temps had occurred.

Rad fidgeted slightly, Kathy cringed, but Jonathan received the dressing down in stony composure, making no effort to escape his share of the blame.

Kathy felt compelled to say, "It wasn't my brother's fault, Mr. Walters. He was sick in bed all last week. I wrote the story. I thought it was funny, at the time."

"It was funny," Rad broke in defensively. "But I should have verified the facts."

"It was ill-considered humor," replied Mr. Walters sternly, "at the expense of a very interesting experiment."

"But certainly the A.C.P.S. ladies *understood!*" Kathy broke in.

Mr. Walters raised a rather testy eyebrow. "I'm afraid you have a lot to learn, Kathleen." He turned on his heel and walked out of the room, leaving the headmaster to make a few final cautionary remarks and tell the trio they were dismissed.

"Before we go," Rad asked, "may I say just one thing?"

"Certainly."

"I want you to know that I consider this my responsibility. Jonathan, who normally would have handled the feature stories, was ill. Kathy was a new reporter. I had every right to be more careful, Mr. Ashley."

"Yes, Radcliff, you did." The headmaster minced no words. "I think we all may have learned an important lesson from this experience."

Out in the hall, Jon hurried away without a word, but Kathy lingered to speak to Rad. "You'd better take my name off the masthead," she suggested wretchedly. "I'm terribly sorry about everything."

"Nonsense," Rad said shortly. He patted her shoulder, trying to be comforting. "By this time next week the whole affair will be forgotten. Buck up, girl! It isn't the end of the world."

But Kathy sat through her afternoon classes feeling truly miserable. If only there was some way she could make amends! Not a single idea presented itself, however, and she arrived home at four o'clock more cowed and depressed than ever before in her short and merry life.

Her mother, hatted and gloved, was just opening the front door. "Oh, there you are, dear!" she said brightly. "There's a young man waiting to speak to you." She turned to the steps leading from the hall to the living room. "I'm afraid I've already forgotten your name."

"Kelso," said the visitor. "Harry Kelso."

"This is my daughter Kathleen, Mr. Kelso. I do hope you'll excuse me, but I've got to run."

"Mother!" Kathy appealed, in an urgent undertone. "What's this all about? You can't—"

"Bertha's in the kitchen ironing," murmured Mrs. McCall, as though this took care of the question of chaperonage. "It's art-class day. Late already. So sorry." Murmuring apologies from a distance, she hurried toward the drive and her parked car.

"This won't take more than a few minutes, Miss McCall," said the young man, with a formality which fell strangely on Kathy's ears. Nobody, so far as she could remember, had ever called her "Miss" before.

Clutching her books against her chest like a shield, Kathy walked slowly into the living room. The obvious question crossed her mind. Could Mr. Kelso be selling magazines? "Why do you want to see me?" she asked.

In answer he handed her a blue press card which named a Boston daily. "I've been sent out to get an interview with you," he said, as though this was the most natural thing in the world. "It seems you've raised quite a stir with a story you wrote for your school paper, and we want to follow it up."

"Oh no!" Kathy gasped, and sank down on the couch as though her legs wouldn't support her a mo-

ment longer. She looked up at this strange—and suddenly inimical—young man with eyes full of dismay. “Please!” She shook her head, not trusting herself to speak until she could control the tremor in her voice.

The reporter, instead of recognizing her humiliation, began to laugh. “That was a pretty clever story, actually. I wish I could have done as well when I was your age.”

“It wasn’t clever. It was stupid!” Kathy fumed, suddenly articulate. “I don’t want to talk about it. I don’t want to be interviewed. I don’t—”

“We don’t have to talk about it,” Mr. Kelso broke in, “but honestly, I can’t see why you’re so upset. I think the A.C.P.S. descending as a body would strike anybody funny. Why—”

It was Kathy’s turn to interrupt. “I’ll tell you why! The facts weren’t even quite straight. The turtles weren’t actually being starved, the way I said.”

“Then what was happening?”

Kathy gulped. “They were just withholding vitamins,” she said, quoting Jon.

“Why?”

“Oh, I don’t know. So they’d get scurvy or something.”

The reporter grinned. “A pleasant thought. The ladies must have loved that.”

“The point is, the turtles aren’t dying. At least not

many of them," Kathy insisted, feeling more and more distracted.

"Let's change the subject. Your father's a scientist, isn't he?"

Kathy nodded. Of this, at least, she could speak with pride. "He's head of the biology department at the university."

"So? And is this your first essay into journalism?"

"Practically. And probably my last," Kathy said bitterly.

"I take it you got hauled upon the carpet," said Mr. Kelso with a chuckle.

"Did I ever! Did *we*, I should say. And it wasn't anybody's fault but mine."

"You seem terribly eager to take all the blame."

"I am."

"Look," said Mr. Kelso, a glint of honesty shining in his blue eyes, "you may have made a boo-boo, as the saying goes, but don't let it throw you. Let me tell you, man to girl, that you needn't be ashamed of that story. It was pretty cute."

With this he took his departure, although Kathy was still protesting as she showed him out of the front door. At least I didn't give him an interview, she thought as she shut him out of her life forever. At least they can't accuse me of *that*!

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She had reassured herself too soon, however, because the next morning, at the breakfast table, Professor McCall came upon a story, prominent on the second page of his morning newspaper, with Kathy's eighth-grade class picture blown up to two-column size. "Scientist's Daughter Undermines Science"—the headline stared him in the face.

"What's this?" he asked. "I thought you said last night you didn't give that newspaper fellow an interview."

"I didn't!" Kathy almost screamed the words. She pushed back her chair and hurried around to read the article over her father's shoulder. Her reaction was a long and despairing groan. "Daddy, I didn't. Honestly!"

"Well, he seems to have a complete picture of the Academy situation, to say nothing of the family," murmured the professor. "Listen to this: 'Making mock-turtle soup out of a routine tenth grade scientific experiment, Kathy McCall, beguiling teen-age daughter of Dr. Richard Pratt McCall, who holds the chair of biology at . . .'"

"How did they get all that?" asked Mrs. McCall with mild curiosity, as she stirred her coffee. "You must have said *something*, Kathy dear. Obviously."

"I told you she was a dope," Jonathan muttered, while Per, glancing from one to another of the Mc-

Calls, looked utterly baffled and more than a little uncomfortable.

Kathy was now very close to tears. Flushed with embarrassment, seething at the trick that had been played on her, she kept insisting that she had told the reporter nothing, except that it was all her fault.

Her father nodded calmly. "He mentions that, but he also has a couple of direct quotes. Did you actually say, Kathy, that 'the turtles aren't dying—at least not many of them?'"

Kathy gulped. "I might have. How can I remember?" She stamped her foot angrily. "He just wasn't playing fair!"

Jonathan made a noise between a disgusted grunt and a snarl, but Dr. McCall swung around to face his daughter. "Maybe he wasn't," he admitted, "but neither were you when you wrote the original story. I should say that this about evens the score."

Jon's scornful face across the table, Per's sincere concern over the situation he didn't understand, her mother's apparent nonchalance, and her father's composure in spite of his obvious disapproval were more than Kathy could face. To return to her chair and attempt to swallow the rest of her scrambled eggs was a physical impossibility. Mumbling a smothered apology, she ran out of the dining room and hurried straight upstairs.

A temporary haven, her bedroom offered her the privacy she needed. Inevitably the tears spilled over, and she stood for several minutes alternately blowing her nose and dabbing it with powder, to eradicate traces of an emotion which must not show as she walked to school.

Finally she slipped into her coat, gathered her books up helter-skelter, and hurried out of the house unobserved. Usually she would have called good-by to her mother, but today even this courtesy was too much for her. She felt misunderstood and maligned, but at the same time filled with self-condemnation. From such an innocent and thoughtless beginning, the turtle incident seemed to be expanding, like concentric circles widening and ever widening from a small pebble dropped in a pool.

This personal publicity, the dreadful newspaper picture with her hair worn the old way and the wide-eyed eighth-grade look, was mortifying enough for Kathy. But that in addition she should have involved her father in the episode was the final straw. She could imagine the ribbing he would take from his colleagues, and her very helplessness to defend him made her suffer afresh.

"Kathy—Kathy, wait a minute!"

Per's voice, some distance behind her, filled her with a childish desire to take to her heels and run. She

didn't want to offend him, but she couldn't talk. The lump in her throat was just too big to control.

"Kathy!"

Pretending not to hear, she hurried on, and deliberately turned the next corner, although the route to school lay straight ahead. Had she escaped? She couldn't turn and look back. But the answer came quickly in a hand on her shoulder. "Kathy, please—"

Impulsively, almost blindly, she twisted away. "Let me alone!"

"Why, Kathy!"

"I can't help it," she cried. "I've just had more than I can take!" In spite of herself two fat tears spilled over again.

"Of course you have." Per's voice was soothing, and he drew her gently over into the shelter of a low-growing tree near a stone wall. He put his books down on the coping, took Kathy's and stacked them on top, then unexpectedly lifted her off her feet and sat her beside them. "Would you like a clean handkerchief?" he asked.

"Thank you." Kathy accepted the folded square of white linen with a barely audible murmur, but she blew her nose vigorously and recovered enough to say, "I'm sorry. I've just made such an awful mess of things."

"Everybody makes mistakes," Per said. "You

mustn't get so upset." It was a plea rather than an admonishment.

Kathy shook her bent head, and her hair swung forward and mercifully shadowed her face. "I—I look like such an awful fool," she stammered. "I'll never write another word as long as I live!"

Per was silent for a long moment, then said earnestly, "That would be very foolish, because you write well. I read the story in the *Orbit*. It was good."

"Good!" Kathy snorted.

"Certainly it was good," Per insisted. "Otherwise it wouldn't have caused all this commotion. A poor piece would have been passed over unnoticed. Don't you see?"

This was a new angle, one that had never occurred to Kathy, and just sensible enough to be intriguing. She lifted tear-drenched eyes to Per's to make sure he was quite sincere.

"Your main problem is that people are laughing at you. That's no fun."

"How would you know?" Kathy mumbled unhappily.

"How would I know?" Per's voice, level until now, became intense. "Don't you suppose I've had a good deal of fun poked at me, these past few weeks?" He laughed shortly. "Not at your house, of course. You're all too well-bred and thoughtful. But at school!"

“Why—why—” Kathy’s own problem dimmed momentarily as she tried to find some words of comfort. “They’re not laughing at you, Per; they’re laughing with you.”

“Are they? Perhaps. Maybe they’re laughing with you too, Kathy. In any case, let’s pretend!”

CHAPTER



8

Fortunately, very few of Kathy's classmates ever took time to glance at a morning newspaper, so word of the wider orbit in which the turtle story was now swinging had not reached school.

This was a decided relief, and it enabled her to get through the morning by keeping her eyes straight in front of her and pretending an unusual interest in her books. Class followed class with predictable certainty to Kathy's secret astonishment.

At noon, still unable to face the crowd in the lunch-room, she bought a sandwich and an apple, crammed them into her coat pockets, and escaped to the seclusion of a grove beyond the athletic field. Here the ground was golden with the last of the maple leaves,

but their transient brilliance did not lift Kathy's spirits. The air had a chilly bite and the fallen log on which she huddled to eat her lunch looked brown and melancholy. Yet in the next half hour she had to gather courage to return to the fray.

How did people like Per manage to present such a smooth façade to the general public, she wondered? Was it just a case of being more grown-up? Certainly—until this morning—she had never suspected him of being especially sensitive or vulnerable; he had seemed to be taking a new life in a new country quite easily in his stride.

But now Kathy had a different perspective on the Swedish boy's personality. His admission, made in an effort to bring her some crumb of comfort, was one which Kathy felt sure never could have been dragged from him in other circumstances. Like an adult, he usually kept his own counsel, and this served to remove him from the urgency of Kathy's particular world.

She admired him, however, enough to want to follow his example. If Per could take the laughter of others without a murmur, wasn't she being just plain cowardly?

Clouds scudded across the chill November sky, offering no answer. Kathy kicked at the fallen leaves and frowned. She'd have to get her chin up and take her

punishment, that's what she'd have to do. She couldn't have Jon calling her a crybaby, on top of everything else!

The mere thought of Jonathan brought her off the log with a bounce. Turning up her coat collar and throwing the apple core in the direction of an inquisitive squirrel, she took a long breath. "Well, here goes," she murmured aloud.

Actually, the importance of Kathy's personal fiasco diminished in direct relation to the approach of Thanksgiving. November was always a busy month, with football and soccer games every Saturday, and term tests looming like a dark cloud on the horizon. Up until this year Kathy had taken exams rather casually, but now the tenseness of the upper school communicated itself even to the more frivolous pupils. Talk in the halls turned to colleges and the serious competition Fifth and Sixth Formers were facing. In due course the episode of the turtles became only a memory, an early fall triviality, and was rarely mentioned again.

The aftertaste, however, remained bitter. Although Rad, true to his promise, kept her name on the masthead, Kathy was assigned to the most routine and inconsequential stories, and only a peculiar but stubborn pride kept her from throwing up the job entirely.

Somehow, she convinced herself that quitting would be letting Rad down.

Not that the editor of the *Orbit* ever glanced Kathy's way these days. He wasn't rude, but he seemed engrossed in weighty problems beyond the ken of a junior reporter. He and Jonathan consulted lengthily over the telephone on matters of *Orbit* policy, planned special issues together with the news editor, and ignored Kathy completely. It seemed to amuse no one that the A.C.P.S., discovering that turtles were not warm-blooded animals but reptiles and therefore outside their jurisdiction, had abandoned its crusade. Kathy, anxious to shuck off her short-lived and spurious fame, didn't even communicate this anticlimax to her family.

At home, as at school, conversation turned to colleges. On a mid-November Sunday, when the boys and Kathy were out raking leaves and Mrs. McCall was planting spring bulbs, Per asked a natural question. "I know Jon has his heart set on Harvard, but where do you want to go, Kathy? I've never heard you say."

Kathy shrugged. "I haven't even thought," she admitted. She was enjoying the crisp sound of the leaves under her feet, the rhythmic sweep of the rake, and the flight of a solitary gull venturing inland from the sea. Nearly three years at the Academy seemed to

stretch so far ahead that college might have been an eternity away.

Her candid reply affected Jon like a red flag waved at the proverbial bull. In fact, he stopped raking and snorted angrily. "She hasn't even thought," he mimicked in a falsetto. "Listen to that, Mother! She'd better start thinking soon, or she'll end up in Tri-State Evening, if that."

"Where's Tri-State Evening?" asked Per innocently.

Kathy giggled. "It's just a made-up name, indicating the lowest of the low." So inured to Jon's disdain that she wasn't particularly offended, it was with complete surprise that she saw her mother turn from her kneeling position by the tulip bed and rock back on her heels.

"If you children don't stop bickering I'm going to scream!" she said, speaking in a complete and very declarative sentence for once. "Jonathan, you haven't said a pleasant word to your sister in the past two weeks. And Kathy, stop being so good-natured. Slap him! I give you my full permission. Slap him hard!"

The tirade was so unexpected and absurd that everyone burst out laughing, and the air was temporarily cleared. For the next fifteen minutes there was a good deal of joking and back chat, but Kathy was fully aware that Jon's nonsense was barbed. Nothing had been resolved between them, and nothing could be, she

feared, unless a miracle brought them together again.

Meanwhile the presence of Per in the house hurt rather than helped the situation. Inhibited by an outsider, the brother and sister settled for an armed truce instead of open war.

Thanksgiving and Mrs. McCall's birthday happened to fall on the same Thursday, and for this day alone they arrived at an unspoken agreement to hoist the white flag. Jonathan actually smiled and said good morning to Kathy when he came downstairs.

Since he was lugging a recognizable package wrapped in brown paper, Kathy smiled back, and helped him carry it into the dining room and lean it against the low sill of a window looking out on the back garden. It was routine in the McCall household for presents to be opened at the conclusion of breakfast, and Mrs. McCall was as excited as a girl by the collection of gifts beside her plate.

She opened them one by one, working from the smallest to the largest, which suited Jonathan's sense of the dramatic perfectly. From her husband she received an antique gold charm for a bracelet, from Kathy a set of three camel's hair paintbrushes, and from Per a delicate small flower container of Orrefors glass, which he had ordered from Stockholm with great foresight a month before. About each she exclaimed

with happy appreciation, but her eyes kept straying to the window sill.

"Now the big one!" she said at last.

Jonathan pushed back his chair and brought the package over. "Something I made myself," he said with a grin.

This, besides being true, was a standard family joke. It dated from a Christmas when, having run out of money buying an orchid plant for her father, Kathy was reduced to making something by hand for her mother. The result was a plaster paper weight, still gummy and wet when presented, and Mrs. McCall's expression when she opened the gift had been both hilarious and unforgettable.

About to cut the cord which bound the brown paper, Mrs. McCall hesitated and glanced at her husband in amusement. "Do I dare?"

Kathy joined in the fun. "Does it bite, Jon?"

"It isn't the shape to bite," their father assured them, speaking as a biologist. "Anyway, Jon said he made it himself, and he isn't *that* creative."

Laughing, Annette snipped the string, and the paper fell back, revealing a three-foot-square canvas. "Why—why it's a painting!"

"That," remarked Jonathan, "is substantially correct."

And Dr. McCall added with deliberate understatement

ment, in the silence which followed, "It is a painting!"

Looking at the offbeat arrangement of squares and triangles and other geometric forms which had been added since she had last seen the canvas, Kathy wondered what her mother would say next. Would she admit to recognizing the hoax or would she pretend to be delighted and impressed?

It happened that Mrs. McCall did neither. She sat looking at the canvas with real interest for perhaps thirty seconds, then glanced at Jon with a twinkle in her eye. "Actually, you know, it's very clever."

Her husband came around and stood behind her chair so that he could get a better view of the painting. "Actually," he commented, repeating the word for emphasis, "I wouldn't know the difference between this and one of your paintings, my love."

He dodged an imaginary blow, but his wife had not taken her eyes from the canvas. "It's like a juggler's trick or a *trompe d'oeil*," she murmured. "A delicious fake."

Jon pretended to be insulted. "Fake nothing. I put every bit of paint on that canvas myself."

"In two days, while he had grippe," chimed in Per.

"A day and a half. I ran out of paint," Jon corrected him.

"A labor of love," suggested his father piously. "Shall we hang it in the living room, dear?"

"Or perhaps over the sideboard?" proposed Kathy, because combined with the soft yellows of the chairs and curtains the brash shades of pink and orange were particularly repulsive.

"Let's put it on the hall table for the moment," ordered Mrs. McCall suddenly. "I've got a turkey to stuff, remember? Kathy, you clear the table. Per, will you help Jon bring in some more firewood, please? And Richard—" But Richard was already heading toward the greenhouse. She could only contemplate his retreating back indulgently.

Thanksgiving dinner was traditionally American, and an experience for Per. Halved grapefruit, stuffed turkey with cranberry sauce, candied sweet potatoes, mashed white potatoes, creamed onions, cole slaw, and pumpkin pie—Kathy could have recited the sequence of dishes in her sleep.

"Does everybody, all over the country, serve the same sort of meal?" Per asked, gazing at the laden table.

"With minor variations," replied his hostess. "Not as good. Of course New England is the home of Thanksgiving. Richard, Per ought to see Plymouth Rock."

"He ought to see Concord and Lexington and the 'rude bridge that arched the flood' and a lot of other things, too," commented Jonathan, as he passed his

plate for another helping of turkey. "We ought to do a tour."

"You can have the car tomorrow," suggested his father helpfully. "There's no school."

The progress of Jonathan's plate stopped abruptly and his mouth fell open. "This is the end—the utter and complete end—being offered the car without having asked for it!"

"Can we go too?" interrupted Kathy. "Mother, please!"

"Who's we?" asked Jon suspiciously.

"Brenda and me."

Her brother groaned. "Oh no! I knew there was a catch in this somewhere."

"You needn't be stinky," said Kathy.

"I don't really see why not," murmured her mother unhappily.

"Oh, all right, all right!" Jonathan gave in gracelessly. "But you'll have to sit in the back seat, the two of you."

This didn't bother Kathy a bit. In fact, she had expected instant refusal, so she clapped her hands in delight. "I'll pack a picnic lunch," she offered. "Cold turkey sandwiches, deviled eggs, hot chocolate."

"Horrible," Mrs. McCall said. "I'm feeling slightly green at the mere thought."

By the following morning, however, she had re-

covered her appetite sufficiently to help with her daughter's preparations, and a bulging wicker hamper was loaded into the back of the station wagon, along with a couple of plaid steamer rugs. It had been decided in a family conference to save Plymouth for a late spring week end when they could go swimming. Today they would concentrate on Boston and its environs, but first of all they had to stop for Brenda, who lived just a few blocks away.

Jonathan honked, rather ungraciously, as he pulled into the drive, but Per, unfailingly polite, was out of the car and had the rear door open by the time Brenda arrived on the steps.

Kathy called a welcome, thinking as she spoke that she had never seen Brenda look so pretty. She was wearing knee-length shorts of Black Watch plaid, long woolen socks, and a yellow sweater just a shade brighter than her shining hair. Over her shoulders was flung a dark green suède jacket, and in her arms she was carefully carrying a flat box.

"Cookies," she announced. "Fresh out of the oven."

"Mmm," murmured Jon, sounding quite civil. "When do we eat?"

"Now, if you like." Brenda opened the box and a warm fragrance drifted through the car. "Have one?"

Munching appreciatively, Jonathan turned the car toward Boston, and Per's conducted tour began. It

was a mild, windless morning for late November, a perfect day to go sightseeing, and Jon proved a remarkably knowing guide. He drove slowly along some of the famous old Boston streets, stopping here and there to point out landmarks which sometimes were as unfamiliar to the girls as to their Swedish guest.

The lavender glass windows along Beacon Street sparkled in the sunlight and people walked in a leisurely fashion through the Common and the Public Garden. Kathy rolled down the back window, enjoying the soft air with its lingering feel of Indian summer, and looked and listened contentedly as they drove up and down the narrow streets of Beacon Hill, inched around Louisburg Square, and managed to park for a few minutes near the Old Granary Burying Ground.

To Brenda's vocal surprise and admiration, Jon knew the names to look for on the worn headstones: John Hancock, Samuel Adams, Paul Revere, Peter Faneuil, and Josiah and Abiah Franklin, the parents of Benjamin. He also knew some amusing stories about early Boston funerals, where wine reputedly flowed by the gallon, and rings and gloves were distributed to the guests.

"There were no prayers at all," he told them, "and only a six-shilling box to put the bones in."

"Six shillings—how much would that be?" Kathy wondered aloud.

"About a dollar and a half in those days."

Brenda smiled winningly. "How do you know so much?" she murmured, with her blue eyes round and innocent.

Kathy expected a crushing retort from her brother, whose opinion of Brenda had always been dim, but today he seemed to be in an unusually mellow mood. "I read books," he replied with a grin. "There are some awfully good books about Boston."

This started Brenda off on a series of questions which lasted until they arrived at the Paul Revere house in North Square, the oldest dwelling still standing in the city. Here, by a kind of mutual consent, the Americans began to recite the famous Longfellow poem for Per's benefit. What one of the three couldn't remember another could, and they managed, with a good bit of hilarity, to get the horseman through every Middlesex village and farm.

Their success impelled Jon to drive Per past Christ Church, from whose belfry the "one if by land and two if by sea" had shone forth. Then he followed Paul Revere's path to Lexington, and attempted to give Per a sketchy account of events leading up to the historic ride.

To Kathy's surprise, Per seemed almost bored. "I'm not sure I understand why you all remain so interested

in the Revolution," he said after a while. "It never seemed to me to be a very important war."

"Not important?" Kathy cried. "Why, it was the most important war of all!"

Per looked thoughtful. "In your history books, maybe. In Europe, of course, the focus is different."

This launched a discussion between the two boys which shut the girls out and lasted until they passed the statue of the Minute Man in the Lexington Common and started on the road to Concord. Kathy and Brenda listened halfheartedly for a while, then started to wonder where they should have lunch. "It would be fun to find a place along the Sudbury," Kathy suggested. "But not near the battleground. That's always too crowded. Somewhere off by ourselves."

They found a spot along the river opposite the Old Manse, which Emerson's grandfather had owned and where Hawthorne had lived and worked. It was a dry, grassy knoll, brown but sunlit, and it afforded a fine view of the tranquil river moving sleepily along between its sedgy borders. Kathy spread out the two steamer rugs and Jon put the hamper in the center. Then the four settled down and helped themselves.

Nibbling on a sandwich, Brenda again turned her attention to Jon. It seemed to Kathy that she was deliberately acting stupid in order to make Jonathan feel important, and if this guess was valid she was cer-

tainly succeeding. Jon was blossoming like a cactus in the sunshine of Brenda's interest.

Per, on the other hand, appeared to be uninterested. When he finished lunch he got to his feet and held out a hand to Kathy. "Feel like going for a walk?"

Jonathan looked up in surprise, but he made no effort to join them. Lying flat on his back, with his head pillowed on a projecting rock, he looked indolent and relaxed.

"Anybody in a hurry to go anywhere else?" Kathy asked.

"Nope," replied her brother. "Take your time."

The knoll overlooked a riverside meadow and bordered a cornfield bounded by an old stone fence. Climbing it, Kathy felt the rocks warm under her hands and said dreamily, "Think of it, Per. The first settlers could have built this."

Per nodded. "It must have been a hard land to clear, this New England." He walked along between the corn stubble for a few minutes, then said unexpectedly, "I don't understand girls like your friend Brenda."

"Don't you?" Kathy pulled back to the present with an effort. "Why not?"

Per frowned and thought for a minute. "Because she always seems to be playing a game. She pretends

to be almost dull-witted, when actually I think she is quite bright. Why?"

Kathy laughed. "She's just playing up to Jon, for some reason or other."

"You mean she finds him attractive?"

"I guess so." It was a novel idea, and Kathy hesitated over this acknowledgment, because in a subtle and unexplored way it seemed a betrayal of all their years of friendship. Brenda—and Jon? The mere pairing of their names made her smile a little, recalling as it did all the times when one had spoken in contempt of the other, recalling, too, the days of hair pulling, of sand-pile fights, of juvenile tricks and occasional tears when Kathy's big brother became too bossy to bear.

Brenda—and Jon? "Oh, I don't know," Kathy corrected herself. "I don't know that she finds him attractive, exactly."

"Jonathan is a very intelligent fellow," said Per gravely. "But why should Brenda not wish to appear intelligent too?"

This I'll never be able to explain, Kathy thought, but she made an attempt. "Sometimes a girl acts like a dumb bunny so a boy will seem brighter by comparison."

"Oh? This is a very odd American custom, I think."

"In Sweden it would not be so?" Smiling, Kathy

mimicked the careful formality of Per's speech.

"Never!" said her companion at once.

Suddenly Kathy burst out laughing, and with a perception that made her suddenly feel years older than the tall, earnest lad at her side, she warned him, "Don't be too sure!"

CHAPTER

9

Because the Academy divided the school year into three semesters, grades came in right after Thanksgiving. Jonathan's were good—superior, in fact—but Kathy's were less than mediocre.

Defensively, she mumbled something about a gentleman's C, but her father immediately hooted. "A gentleman's C became a gentleman's B years ago!"

"Anyway," said Kathy, striving desperately for a light touch, "I'm no gentleman."

"Extremely immature," was Jonathan's verdict. He tossed the words toward his father as though he were throwing a ball, but it was Kathy who caught it. "A common disease of the young," she commented, with her nose in the air.

"Bickering," said her mother, from force of habit.

Per was only mildly pleased with his report, although it was considerably better than Kathy's. "I think you should be very proud of yourself," Dr. McCall said encouragingly. "You're working in a foreign language and in a foreign school. Try to imagine Kathy taking all her courses in French. Where would she end up?"

"In the Charles River," said Kathy succinctly, but banter couldn't change the first-term verdict. Only an A in English saved Kathy from total family disgrace.

She made up her mind to work harder, but the weeks before Christmas were never conducive to concentration. With her math book open before her she could daydream by the hour. The figures blurred on the printed page and her pencil kept making doodles instead of diagrams on the pad of lined paper.

Although she couldn't have said exactly what was wrong, Kathy felt as though she were marking time in a vacuum. Instead of being filled with her usual joy of living, she was almost choked by a sense of inadequacy. The entire household vibrated around her, each person busy with his own pursuits, leaving Kathy as isolated as an island. Rush, rush, rush! What was it all about?

The day of the sight-seeing excursion, reduced to a bright pin point in time, seemed to belong to another

life. Jonathan had withdrawn and aligned himself with the intellectual mighty once more, and he looked down on his younger sister as a hill looks down on a dale.

Kathy was home alone late one afternoon, lying on the rug in front of an open fire for which she had carted the logs herself, when a messenger came for some of her mother's paintings, which were to be exhibited in a show at the public library. Several canvases leaning against the stair banisters in the hall looked probable, so Kathy delivered these into the young man's custody.

He consulted a slip. "There's only three here. I was supposed to pick up four." His glance ranged around the hall and lit on Jonathan's birthday present, which was still propped against the wall behind the hall table. "What about that one?"

About to burst out laughing, Kathy was struck by a sudden impulse. She brushed a lock of hair from her forehead in order to hide the twinkle in her eye, turned toward the painting, and said, "Well, maybe. . . ."

"Looks O.K. to me," said the messenger, who obviously knew nothing whatever about the matter beyond the numbers on his list.

Kathy pretended reluctance. "D'you really think so?"

"Frankly, sister, I can't tell one end from the other," the young man admitted with a wry grin. "There's some looks like chicken scratchings and others like there's been a fire sale at the paint store."

"Very well," said Kathy, "take it along. If it's wrong I'll have to let you know."

"Okey doke." The four paintings disappeared into the early dark and Kathy leaned against the closed door, giggling helplessly. "That'll larn ya," she said aloud, but she had a moment's trepidation, because the wall behind the hall table looked so unexpectedly empty.

Nobody, however, seemed to notice the loss, although Kathy had expected her mother or Jon to pounce on the painting's disappearance the minute one or the other entered the house. As usual, however, everybody was late and in a hurry.

There was dinner to get, the orchids to fertilize, phone calls to make, homework to do, letters to write, bills to pay, hair to wash, a lecture to prepare.

Everyone went about his or her personal life for still another busy evening. The stream of detail, it seemed to Kathy, was never-ending.

By nine-thirty, ready for bed with her damp hair twisted on rollers, she began to feel rather let down. The joke had lost some of its flavor, since no one even

missed the painting. She longed to share the secret of her prank, and started to the telephone to call Brenda, but halfway down the stairs she stopped, thought for a moment, then padded up again slowly. Brenda had become unpredictable since the day of the picnic. She might not be amused.

Kathy's indignation at Jonathan flared anew, because it seemed to her that this feeling of estrangement was his fault. It wasn't enough to make her life miserable at home, to ridicule her to the *Orbit* staff, to undermine her standing with Per. Oh no! He had to alienate her best friend. She forgot that it was Brenda who had initiated the mild flirtation, and blamed her brother for every misdemeanor she could lay at his door. It seemed impossible that they had ever been friends.

Gradually, the bitterness Kathy had been building up all fall was becoming a physical as well as a mental animosity. She disliked the way Jonathan's hair grew, in a series of little cowlicks impossible to comb. She disliked his big feet, the way he squinted when he was especially interested in something, his habit of talking over the telephone in a muted mumble. As a matter of fact she couldn't find a single redeeming characteristic. That he could interest Brenda even for a moment seemed ridiculous, and a reflection on her friend's good taste.

Crouched on the window seat with her arms hug-

ging her knees, Kathy disliked herself almost as much as she did her brother. She was ashamed of reacting this way, deeply ashamed, but she couldn't seem to help it. Emotions she had never before had to deal with were coming into play—rancor and jealousy. Hurt feelings she understood, even tolerated, because she knew they were transient, and they didn't twist or warp a person's nature. But this—this was different! She didn't even feel like Kathy McCall, but like someone she didn't recognize.

Nighttime, as always, made every bruise to the spirit hurt more. Kathy crawled into bed feeling tender all over. Gone was the sunny disposition which always had endeared her to her parents, gone the outgoing, cheerful attitude toward life. If this went with growing up, she wanted no part of it. Gladly she would have turned the clock back to the time when she and Jon were good companions, instead of hating the mere sight of each other, as they did now.

Yes, she admitted to herself, the impulse to send his nonsense painting off with her mother's was merely an attempt to humiliate her brother. As Brenda would surely say, it wasn't funny-funny but funny-mean. Brenda! Kathy really needed a confidante as never before, but her mind kept returning to the conviction that Jonathan had alienated Brenda along with everybody else.

It was for this, most of all, that she couldn't forgive

him. It was the straw that finally broke the camel's back, thought Kathy, not disdaining to employ any hackneyed old truism to define the way she felt. He was poisoning her life, spoiling her fun, stripping away her self-confidence. If only she could find some effective way to strike back!

Of course, in the morning, her emotions were once more bridled and under control. School routine proved positively soothing, and by noon Kathy's smile seemed as bright as ever, so that Steve Whitely, encountering her on the way to lunch, asked, "How about going to a movie at the Brattle tonight?"

"Tonight? Oh, it's Friday, isn't it?" Kathy reminded herself. "Sure," she said.

She liked Steve and knew that he was still feeling unhappy about giving her what he called "a bum steer" on the turtle story. "What time?"

"Seven-thirtyish," Steve replied. "I'll see if I can get the wagon."

It was still a novelty to Kathy to have a date with a boy who had the use of a car, although now, one by one, several of her classmates were getting their licenses. There was something about hearing the crunch of wheels on the drive that was peculiarly satisfying. It raised her a notch in her own estimation, and made it easier to brush past Jon, who was carting his skis through the front hall, with a casual good-by.

The film, a Hollywood effort, was mediocre. It con-

cerned a May-December romance which seemed quite implausible to Kathy. The acting was wooden and the characters types rather than individuals, but the audience seemed indulgent and even amused. Afterward, Steve said, "Let's get something to eat," and she agreed immediately. Boredom always made her hungry as a bear.

They were seated at a table in a Harvard Square eating place and had already ordered when Steve suddenly looked across the room and groaned.

"What's the matter?" Kathy asked, following his glance but unable to discover anything more remarkable than a couple of middle-aged women occupying a booth.

"Don't look now," Steve cautioned, "but that's my mother. Let's hope she doesn't see us or we'll be in for it." He hitched his chair slightly to the left as he spoke, so that he presented a shoulder rather than his profile to the opposite side of the room.

Kathy had never met Steve's mother. Puzzled at his reaction, she asked, "What do you mean, in for it?"

Steve shook his head so vehemently that he looked like a dog shaking off water. "She haunts me," he muttered. "She won't let me alone."

Kathy chuckled. "Maybe she's fond of you," she suggested.

"Fond of me!" Although he spoke barely above a

whisper, Steve's words were explosive. "She's fond of the League of Women Voters and the Wellesley Alumnae and the Friends of Music and all those other organizations she's on the board of, that's what she's fond of—not me!"

"Oh, now, Steve!"

"It's true. She treats me like another project. She hovers over me and tries to run me, but she isn't fond of me or she'd catch on."

"Catch on to what?" Without waiting for an answer, Kathy asked, "Which one is your mother, anyway?"

"The one in the hat," admitted Steve, without looking up.

"She's very pretty," suggested Kathy. "And it's a stunning hat."

"With that feather? It looks like an Indian war bonnet."

Kathy laughed in real amusement. "Daddy never likes Mother's hats either." Then she added, in a lowered voice, "I'm afraid they've recognized your back."

It was true. The two women, having paid their check, threaded their way between the small tables, but even then Steve didn't turn around. He waited until his mother's hand touched his shoulder, then pushed back his chair and stood up sulkily. "Hi," he

growled morosely. "Mother, Aunt Sal, this is Kathy. Kathy, this is my mother and my aunt, Mrs. Carpenter."

Kathy got to her feet as he was speaking, and said good evening with a pleasant smile.

Mrs. Whitely extended her hand. "Kathy?"

"Kathy McCall."

"Oh, you must be Dr. McCall's daughter. *You* know, Sarah, the professor who—"

"That's the one," Steve interrupted firmly. He shifted from one foot to the other as though he were about to make a fifty-yard dash.

Mrs. Carpenter nodded. "I know your mother. We go to the same art class. But I must say, she's head and shoulders above me. She can really paint!"

"I'll tell her you said so. She'll be pleased," Kathy said with real sincerity.

"Have you children been having fun?" Mrs. Whitely broke in. "Where have you been? The movies? What did you see?"

"A dud," said Steve, in another obvious attempt to end the conversation.

For a flickering instant Mrs. Whitely looked embarrassed and hurt; then her smile appeared bravely again. "The movies aren't very good these days," she agreed, addressing Kathy. "Do get Steve to bring you over to see us, dear. It's so very nice to meet one of

his girls." She turned to go at last, then hesitated. "You don't need a lift, do you? No. I forgot—you have your father's car."

Steve mumbled something unintelligible that might have been taken for a good-by, and slumped in his seat once more. "Well, you see," he told Kathy. "Why does she have to make such a bubbling idiot of herself?"

"Steve!" Kathy sounded as shocked as she felt. "Anyway, it's not 'bubbling,' " she added with an attempt at a lighter touch.

"Bundling, then." Steve was too distraught to get his clichés sorted out. " 'So nice to meet one of his girls,' " he quoted acidly. "Making a goon out of me, didn't I tell you?" He pounded his fist against the table in desperation and his eyes were stormy and dark. "As though I had girls by the dozen. Ha!"

"She was just trying to be pleasant," Kathy protested gently. Even if Mrs. Whitely had been both tactless and oversolicitous, in Steve's eyes, she could see no reason why he should be so enraged.

"Pleasant!" Fortunately the waitress came at that moment with the order, and Steve broke off abruptly. "Skip it," he said, and managed a wry grin. "Let's eat. I can't expect you to understand."

But although Kathy did not pursue the subject, she understood more than Steve guessed. There was just

enough fury and frustration in his attitude to remind her of her own feelings about Jon. Although Mrs. Whitely seemed to her a normally attractive and interested mother, she sensed that Steve had nurtured a corrosive antagonism he could no longer hide. All the way home she was deeply disturbed by this discovery. Here was a boy she thought she knew well, a boy she had always been able to talk to and laugh with, developing a side to his nature so ugly and violent that it was a little terrifying.

If only there was some way to reach him, some way to help. When he pulled the car up at the side of the drive she made no attempt to reach for the door handle, but just sat there, wondering what she could say.

It was Steve who spoke first. "I'm sorry I blew my top," he apologized. "I didn't mean to spoil the evening, but sometimes I get fed up to here." He drew a line across his throat descriptively.

"You didn't spoil the evening," Kathy said slowly. "It's—it's just that I never suspected you felt so strongly—about anything." She looked at the rather gangly lad behind the wheel, who had always seemed so easygoing. "I guess I was just shocked."

"Shocked?" Steve laughed shortly. "Because I hate my mother?"

"You don't hate her!" Kathy cried. "Don't say things like that!" Because she and her own mother

had always been so close, the bald statement was doubly upsetting. She wanted to jump out of the car, run into the house, and close her ears to such violence. She also wanted to take Steve by the shoulders and shake him, until he admitted that this was an arrant lie.

But her vehemence was lost on the boy beside her. "Just because the truth isn't very pretty doesn't mean it isn't the truth," he said, too calmly. "I can't help the way I feel."

"You can help it," Kathy insisted, turning so that she faced him. "You can try to be at least decent. *She* doesn't know what she's doing wrong."

"Then why doesn't somebody tell her?" Steve asked, aroused once more. "Why can't Dad or somebody explain she ought to let me off the hook? How would you feel if somebody was always breathing down your neck, Kathy? Day in—day out!"

Unexpectedly, Kathy reached out and covered Steve's clenched fist with a warm hand. "Look," she said, speaking straight out of her own experience, "I don't know what's behind all this, but I do understand what you're going through. Believe me."

Steve shook his head wordlessly.

"Honestly I do," Kathy insisted. "And I know you're going to feel like a heel because you told me about it."

Unwilling confirmation came into the boy's eyes. "So what?"

"So don't be sorry, please," Kathy begged. "It's better to get things out than let them . . . fester inside."

"Maybe." Steve sounded doubtful.

Kathy sat quiet for a moment, wondering if she dared go on. "You're not going to like this," she said hesitantly, "but I feel sorry for your mother. It's terrible to have somebody despise you. And of course she knows how you feel."

"She couldn't know!" It was Steve who sounded horrified now. "I've never said—"

"You don't have to *say* anything!" cried Kathy. "You show it in every gesture you make, in every word you speak." She began pounding Steve's clenched hand with her own fist in unconscious emphasis.

"How can you be sure of that?"

"How?" But Kathy realized suddenly that she couldn't tell him how. She could listen and sympathize and try to understand and even to help, but she couldn't confide in return. "I know, that's all," she said miserably. Then, unable to support this disastrous conversation any longer, she twisted around and felt for the door handle. "I've got to go now. Please don't come with me. Oh—and thanks for the movie, Steve."

CHAPTER



10

With the front door closed behind her, Kathy leaned against it, trembling. She always felt unable to cope with emotional outbursts, and Steve's had upset her particularly, because it struck so very close to home.

Fortunately, her parents had gone to a dinner party and were not yet back, so she wouldn't have to present them with an improbable description of a pleasant evening. As soon as her heart stopped pounding she crossed the hall and started wearily up the stairs, hoping that the boys were out too.

But in the second-floor hall she met Per, who was kneeling before the drawers of an antique cabinet used for the storage of odds and ends. For some reason he looked more than a little woebegone, and when he

heard her step he sat back on his heels and said, "Hello, Kathy. I wonder if you might know where I could find some string."

"String?" It wasn't easy for Kathy to shift quickly from the epic to the insignificant. "Must you have it tonight?"

"If I could find some," Per said, "it would be a help. I'm wrapping a present for my family, and I should take it to the post office first thing tomorrow morning. It is rather late already, you see."

"Late?" Kathy's mind was still elsewhere.

"For Christmas," Per said.

"Oh, of course!" With belated acknowledgment of the practical and everyday, she added, "I'll say it's late. You'd better send it air mail, hadn't you?"

Then she looked at Per more closely. Why, he's homesick, she realized. He's been here alone all evening, wrapping packages and feeling wretched. "Where's Jon?" she asked, as she squatted beside him and pulled open the drawer where wrapping materials were usually kept.

"He has gone to a party with Liz."

"Weren't you invited too?" Kathy sounded positively indignant.

Per smiled gently. "Yes," he said, "I was, but this could not be put off any longer."

"Here." Kathy held up a ball of cord. "Can I help?"

"No thanks. I've just about finished."

Kathy stood looking after Per as he mounted the stairs to the third floor. Even his back looked dejected, she thought. Where was the military erectness that Brenda called Per's trademark? Perhaps, after all, he wasn't quite as grown-up and self-sufficient as everyone thought.

She remembered the first summer she had been sent to camp, when Manchester, Vermont, seemed a million miles from Boston and the arrival of her birthday only served to top off her misery. There she was, in a cabin full of giggling, uninterested strangers, when the only place in the world she wanted to be was home.

Per, she suspected, felt much the same way. The first excitement of arrival in a new country was over. Superficially, he had settled into the life at school and in the McCall household, but Christmas was bound to be a time when he would long to be with his own family.

The next morning Kathy managed to invent an errand in the same direction as the post office, and walked along with Per. Instead of avoiding the subject, she asked questions about the holiday season in Sweden. "Tell me, is it so very different?"

The question made Per smile. "How will I know, until I have spent a Christmas here?"

"I mean, do you have street decorations and department-store Santa Clauses and things?"

Per hesitated. "Not the way you do. It isn't so . . . commercialized." He raised his chin almost aggressively. "I think it's nicer."

Kathy nodded understandingly. "I would too."

There was an inflection in her voice which made Per unexpectedly expansive. "At home," he said, "on the first of December we always put a star on the dining table. On each point there is a candle, and we light one candle for each Sunday in December. Then on Christmas day we light all of them at once. Do you do that?"

"No," Kathy admitted. "But we have a star at the top of our Christmas tree."

"Does your father dress up as Santa Claus on Christmas morning?"

"No longer. He used to when we were very little."

"Do you carry torches to church?" Per asked.

Kathy shook her head. "I've never heard of doing that."

Suddenly Per became more talkative than Kathy had ever found him. Eyes alight with enthusiasm, he described not only the torchlight processions but the *jultomte* and other Swedish holiday customs that were

close to his heart, and in return Kathy told him about the traditional carol singing on Christmas Eve. "We'll have to go to Beacon Hill," she planned, "because it's the best place of all to hear the carolers. All the windows of the houses on Louisburg Square are lighted with real candles, and it's very beautiful."

"I would like that," Per said simply, and when he left her at the next corner there was a renewed lift to his head and a spring in his step.

When Kathy reached home again she went directly to her mother. "Per's homesick," she said. "We've got to treat him quite gently around Christmas time, I think."

Mrs. McCall nodded slowly. "Very perceptive. I thought he was moping, but decided it must be some difficulty at school." She opened the oven door to check a pumpkin pie which was baking, then closed it again and came over to perch on a stool by the counter. "Tell me about it," she said.

Kathy explained in careful detail. It was always easy to talk to her mother, and while she was unburdening herself concerning Per's reaction to the coming holidays, she was also swept by an impulse to tell her about Steve.

It wouldn't be easy. It seemed like such an intimate disclosure that Kathy stumbled along irresolutely, un-

certain whether or not this was a secret too raw and painful to be divulged.

"Do you suppose that when a boy tells you something very private you have a right to talk it over with somebody else—somebody like your own mother, I mean?"

"It depends." Mrs. McCall looked unusually serious and thoughtful. "Could an older person be of any help?"

Kathy frowned. "I don't know."

Her mother waited quietly and without urgency.

Kathy took a deep breath. "When you were young did any of your friends dislike their parents?"

"Not many—or not for long."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well," said Mrs. McCall, weighing her words carefully, "there comes a time when most young people need to cut themselves loose. This is normal. But sometimes the break is very violent." She chuckled reminiscently. "I remember there was a period when I positively hated my mother. She and I became strangers overnight."

Kathy was appalled. "But—I thought—"

"Don't worry, dear. We get along beautifully now."

"I can't understand it," Kathy admitted.

"You will. You just haven't reached that phase," Mrs. McCall said frankly. "Take Jon."

"It isn't *you* he loathes the sight of. It's me," Kathy blurted out.

Her mother nodded. "But he'll outgrow it. Just be patient, pet." She checked the pie again and pulled it, fragrant and steaming, out of the oven. "Girls," she commented in passing, "are so much easier than boys."

"How easier?"

Mrs. McCall shrugged. "They have more social perception, for one thing. They aren't so—violent."

Kathy walked slowly out of the kitchen. Although she hadn't mentioned Steve's name nor betrayed his confidence she felt as though a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. It wasn't so much her mother's words as her point of view that was comforting. Steve's secret no longer seemed an insupportable burden—but so far as her own brother was concerned, Kathy remained unconvinced that his attitude represented a temporary phase.

Her feeling was confirmed a moment later, when Jonathan burst into the house in a tearing rage. "Mother!" he shouted. "Mother! Who sent my picture to the library art show?"

"*Your* picture? Why, I didn't. Naturally. Isn't it in the hall?" Mrs. McCall came from the kitchen, looking vaguely perturbed. "No, I guess not," she added.

Kathy, about to go upstairs, stopped in mingled con-

sternation and glee, frozen to the spot in which she found herself. Jonathan, meanwhile, was shaking a long and angry finger at the world in general.

"It's down there—hung—with the rest of those—"

"Hung?" Incredulity colored Mrs. McCall's question. "Goodness! Such a mistake."

"I don't believe it was a mistake," Jon roared. "They said it was delivered—delivered, mind you—along with yours!"

At this Kathy rediscovered the power of locomotion. Tiptoeing, in an effort to be inconspicuous, and turning her head to hide an impish grin, she started to go upstairs.

But suddenly Jonathan whirled on her. "I'll . . . bet . . . Kathy . . . did . . . it!" he bellowed, pausing for emphasis between each word.

"Kathy? Nonsense. Kathy wouldn't—" Mrs. McCall broke off in sudden foreboding. Unable to control herself any longer, Kathy was giggling uncontrollably. Overcome by mirth, she completely collapsed, sinking down on the nearest step and holding her stomach. "Oh . . . oh, oh, oh!"

Jonathan's finger now pointed heavenward, as if invoking a judgment. "See!"

"I—I couldn't help it," Kathy confessed, when she could get her breath. "I thought you'd miss it right away. I didn't dream they'd actually hang it!" Burst-

ing into a new fit of giggles, she rocked back and forth with tears of merriment in her eyes. "Imagine!"

Jon was not only unamused, he was flushed with fury. "Of all the low-down tricks! Of all the dumb, silly, stupid, juvenile things to do! Why don't you grow up?"

"Mae West's advice to teen-agers. Grow up," murmured Mrs. McCall, in an effort to halt her son's tirade.

But levity at such a critical moment was unappreciated. Jon, who had been approaching Kathy as though he intended to shake her, swiveled around to face his mother. "She's a disgrace, that's what she is, a disgrace to our family! First that simple-minded turtle story, making us all a laughingstock, and now this! The worst of it is, the people down there didn't guess. They thought it was intended. They've even—even given it an award."

"An award? *Your* picture?" Mrs. McCall sank down on a hall chair. With a peal of laughter as impossible to stifle as Kathy's choked giggles, she contemplated her irate son. "Honestly?"

"It's no joking matter," Jonathan snapped.

"What kind of an award?"

"A special one," Jonathan said glumly, his voice dropping several octaves.

"A finger-painting prize?" Kathy gasped hysterically.

"Shut up!" Jon commanded, ignoring his mother's quick "Jonathan!" He began to stride up and down the hall in a Napoleonic rage. "A card says 'Honorable mention. For an abstract arrangement of planes in space.' What do you think I'm going to feel like when this gets around?"

"I should think you'd feel rather good," said his mother mildly.

"Good? I'm going to feel like a fool, that's what. Everybody knows I'm no artist!"

"'You can fool everybody some of the time,'"

quoted Kathy, who was by this time unquenchable.

But Jon ignored her. "I tried to get it back," he explained to his mother. "I even told them it was all a big mistake, but they said it was too late; it was like Boris Pasternak."

"Pasternak?" Mrs. McCall repeated in baffled amusement.

"Sure. I get honorable mention whether I accept it or not. Just like he got the Nobel Prize. Refusing doesn't change things."

Kathy and her mother burst out laughing afresh, but Jonathan became more indignant than ever. "Where's Dad?" he asked, and strode out of the hall, slamming the door behind him.

"Women!" they could hear him muttering as he

made his way through the kitchen to the rear of the house. "Women!"

The show continued in the library all the next week, so of course the *Orbit* picked the story up, and once more a younger member of the McCall family was in the news. Kathy, with great forbearance, had said nothing about the matter at school, but Rad went to the library one afternoon to work on research for an English paper and spotted Jon's painting with the unerring instinct of a bird dog flushing a covey of quail.

He sent a photographer around with flash equipment and got a picture of the picture, which in black and white looked more unlikely than ever. This was boxed with a brief but humorous story headed:

WHODUNIT?

Art Jury Hoodwinked

by Academy Neophyte

Jon bore the publicity, and the amusement of his friends, with an air of stoicism quite at odds with his real feelings. Kathy, watching from the side lines, was of two minds. On one hand she said to herself, "Now we're even," but on the other she couldn't help but sympathize, because she had so recently been in the same position herself. It was useless, however, to try

to comfort her brother. He wouldn't even speak to her, except under duress at the breakfast or dinner table. Most of the time he treated Kathy as though she were invisible, looking right through her if he encountered her on the street or at school.

Any feeling of poetic justice Kathy might have nurtured died quickly. She wished a dozen times that she had been less impulsive, and even said to her mother, "I'm sorry. I didn't dream Jon would be so *really* sensitive."

"Boys of that age," murmured Mrs. McCall, shaking her head. "Don't worry. Useful experience, actually."

"What I can't understand," Brenda admitted to Kathy in wide-eyed wonder, "is why he should be so annoyed. If anybody gave me honorable mention for *anything* I'd just say, 'Goody, goody. And thank you very much!'"

CHAPTER



11

Fortunately, time hurried along so rapidly at this time of year that there was hardly opportunity for Jon's artistic acclaim to become a nine days' wonder. As usual, the entire McCall family put off buying Christmas presents until the last possible minute, and then there was a flurry of wrapping and tying packages and decorating the house.

It was their custom to bring in greens from some woodland acres near Concord which belonged to one of the professor's friends, and it was always a special joy to Kathy to drive out to the country on a cold December morning when ice coated the ponds and dry leaves crackled underfoot. She cut the laurel that would be used for festoons above the mantel and

crowded it into an empty apple basket while her mother went hunting for ground pine and bearberry.

The men always made the decision on the tree, Jonathan arguing for maximum height while his father plumped for a full and conical shape. Finally a compromise was reached, and Per helped bind the branches and saw the trunk, while Kathy stood by feeling momentarily sad. It always seemed such a pity to cut down a live tree for Christmas, much worse when it was a personal involvement than if the tree was purchased from one of the forests burgeoning for a fortnight around the roadside stands. But of course when the lights were strung and bright ornaments were brought out of their boxes and hung on the branches, she would forget this and revel in the glitter and in the nostalgic odor of spruce which perfumed the whole lower floor of the house.

There is something about the Christmas season likely to thaw the most confirmed misogynist, and gradually Jon succumbed to the prevailing warmth. By the time school closed for the holidays he was again on speaking terms with his sister, although he made it obvious that this was a concession indeed.

Kathy was ready for peace on any terms. Friendly and affectionate by nature, she felt it especially important to surround Per with loving-kindness here and

now. This, of course, meant enlisting Jon's co-operation, and as soon as she sensed it was safe she approached him concerning a Christmas Eve expedition to Louisburg Square.

"Sure, I'll go," agreed Jonathan, to her great relief. "You got Brenda signed up too?"

Brenda hadn't entered Kathy's calculations. "I haven't mentioned it," she admitted.

She was overcome by surprise when Jon replied, "You might as well. The more the merrier."

Brenda, who usually fell in with any proposal quickly and happily, was oddly hesitant when Kathy phoned her. "Why didn't Jonathan call me himself?" she asked.

Kathy whooped. "Jon? He's never called you yet, has he?"

There was an instant's silence on the other end of the wire. "There's always a first time," said Brenda haughtily.

Nonplussed, Kathy felt out of patience with her best friend. "Well, the first time may be never. Are you coming or not?"

"Oh, I'll come." If Brenda could have transmitted a shrug she would certainly have done so, Kathy suspected. "I haven't anything better to do."

There had been no snow whatever in Boston during

December, but with a theatrical sense of timing big, fluffy flakes began to fall upon the city at seven o'clock on Christmas Eve. They drifted down lazily, floating on the air like puffballs, promising that this would be no blizzard, but simply an invitation to Christmas written in appropriate white.

Kathy had made sure that Per was kept busy all day. He had helped to string the complicated series of lights and decorate the tree with balls and ornaments accumulated over the years since Jonathan's infancy. The turkey was stuffed, the cranberry jelly strained into molds, and the mince pies ready for the oven. Scarlet poinsettias and a great spray of Dr. McCall's prize white orchids decorated the dining room, and everything that Kathy considered traditional and right had been done. She was tired, but happy-tired, just mellow and relaxed enough to feel that walking up Beacon Hill in the light snow was something she would never forget.

Jonathan strode ahead with Brenda, who had arranged things neatly, so that the sound of their voices was curtailed and muted by the snow. Per, who never chattered, walked along with his hands thrust deep into his jacket pockets. With Scandinavian fortitude he had refused to wear a topcoat, but Kathy was bundled into a scarlet hood and snow boots, with the collar

of her green loden-cloth school coat turned up around her ears.

"You look like a Swedish girl tonight," Per told her, as they plodded up Pinckney Street on the narrow, uneven brick pavement.

"Do I? Why?"

"Because your cheeks are red and you're wearing a skirt instead of shorts."

"Don't you like Bermuda shorts?"

Per shook his head. "In Sweden no girl would wear shorts on the street. I can't get used to them."

Kathy laughed gaily. "Goodness, you sound stuffy!" she teased him. "As though you've stepped back a full generation, into the past."

"I feel as though I have, tonight," Per said with a smile. He was looking at the lighted candles appearing more and more frequently in the windows of the narrow brick houses, the closer they came to Louisburg Square.

Now they could see the statue of Columbus at one end of the tiny central park, whose spare trees were enclosed by a curving iron fence. Gazing inquiringly into the windows of an apartment house across Pinckney Street, the discoverer of America always amused Kathy, because he looked so intent. She pointed him out to Per, along with Aristides the Just at the other end of the square, and remembered that her father

had once told her they were the first outdoor statues in Boston. But far more interesting than the statues, Per found the beautiful façades of the houses, with their curtains drawn back from the lighted candles to show the interiors, gracious with fine paneling, polished antique furniture, and rich brocades.

Jon was especially knowledgeable concerning detail. "That's a Bulfinch stairway," he said with certainty, as they paused before a house with wrought-iron balconies. And a little later he said, "I think that's a Copley painting, over the sofa on the right."

Somewhere in the distance a church clock tolled the hour of eight, and at this signal all automobile traffic was stopped. Hundreds of visitors were now overflowing the streets, strolling through the snow and smiling at one another and at perfect strangers, in a semireligious, semicarnival spirit that Per evidently found very interesting.

"They're like a summer Sunday crowd at Skansen," he murmured, as though he were talking not to others but to himself. "For once nobody's in a hurry, nobody at all."

He had scarcely finished speaking when the strains of a well-remembered carol were lifted on the winter air.

"God rest ye merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay."

Kathy tugged at Per's arm. "Let's get closer," she whispered, "where we can see."

The singers were dressed in Puritan costumes, the gray stuff soft as a pigeon's wing against the white flakes, and they carried colonial lanterns, which lighted their faces with a rosy glow. Moving from house to house, they sang one traditional carol after another, and Kathy listened with a feeling that at this particular hour she would wish to be nowhere else in the world. Unconsciously she had kept her hand tucked under Per's arm, and he held it against his side tightly, as though he wanted to tell her he was aware that this was very special, and that he too was stirred by the scene. Jon and Brenda had found a place on a flight of granite steps, and they were sitting side by side, looking equally rapt. The most heart-warming of all Boston sights and sounds, their expressions said, is Christmas Eve on Beacon Hill.

This was just as Kathy would have wished it. When a band of skillful bell ringers made their rounds on the heels of the carolers, she felt proud of the cherished custom. It was right and important that Per should be seeing something of American tradition, so that he could take back to Sweden a few memories worth treasuring.

It was nine-thirty when the four finally turned down the hill again to retrieve the parked car and drive

home. "‘Everywhere, everywhere Christmas tonight,’" murmured Brenda, as they passed house after house where lighted trees glimmered and families were gathered beyond windows curtained by the gauzy fall of snow. She came along as a matter of course to the McCalls', where cocoa and fruitcake were waiting and a fire was crackling merrily in the living room.

The girls kicked off their shoes and sat down on the hearthrug to toast their cold toes, and after a moment Per followed suit. Kathy smiled approval. "You're learning," she said. "Even a month ago you wouldn't have done such a thing."

"Nonsense." Per grinned, and for confirmation looked to Dr. McCall, who was distributing packages helter-skelter under the Christmas tree.

"What Per has learned quickly is to put up with our teasing," murmured the professor. "At first it must have seemed very impertinent."

"That was because I didn't understand the system, sir."

"We only tease people we love," broke in Mrs. McCall, but Kathy considered this too effusive and remonstrated with a quick "Mother!"

Brenda laughed, hugging her knees and looking like a Christmas angel in her white brushed wool sweater, with eyes very blue in the firelight and her blond bangs spilling over her forehead in calculated disarray.

She started to hum, " "The first day of Christmas my true love sent to me . . . ' " and Mrs. McCall took it up, followed by the rest. They sang the words from first to last, until finally all the marvelous gifts were enumerated.

It was Kathy's favorite carol, and she sang with the rest:

" 'Five golden rings, four colly birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree. . . . ' "

Then, before anyone could quite realize it, the time came to bundle up again and go to the midnight service at church, where the organ music was soft and religious and the only light near the altar was provided by tall white tapers. After the brief but very beautiful ceremony Dr. and Mrs. McCall drove Brenda home through a night grown suddenly cold. The snow had stopped, and Kathy, yawning, felt that she could scarcely stay awake long enough to say good night.

"Put these under the tree," Brenda whispered at the last moment, and thrust two small packages into her hand. "And come over in the morning, if you can." Then she slammed the car door and called, "Thank you! It was a wonderful evening! And Merry Christmas, everybody."

"Merry Christmas!" the McCalls echoed.

Then Per chimed in with "*God Jul*," pronouncing it as though he were saying "Good Yule" in English.

Kathy, however, scarcely heard him. Two presents, she was thinking. Why two? She and Brenda always exchanged gifts, with the firm stipulation that nothing they bought for each other must cost more than a dollar; but these packages were so small they could easily have been wrapped together. Did that mean—?

It was impossible to read the cards in the darkness, but the two small boxes in their holiday wrappings felt like hot potatoes in Kathy's hands. If Brenda thought—

Kathy's curiosity mounted in direct proportion to her feeling of discomfort. When the car was finally garaged and she could walk into the lighted living room and get a glimpse of the tags, she did so instantly, although she instinctively cushioned her premonition with a kindly thought. It would really be awfully sweet of Brenda to remember Per.

But it wasn't Per's name which was printed neatly in the familiar script; it was her brother's. Just as Kathy had suspected!

Very slowly she walked over and put the two packages under the tree with the rest of the presents, but her sense of dismay lingered, even after she had kissed her parents good night and gone to bed. It seemed to

her that Brenda's gesture was not only surprising but embarrassing. Jonnie hadn't even dreamed of giving Brenda anything; that was certain! To have her best friend follow her brother around like a puppy begging for a pat on the head was one thing, but to have her shout her interest to the world in general by giving him a Christmas present was not only in bad taste, it was the kiss of death for any possible romance. Jon would be sore as a wet hen, because the present—no matter what it was—would obligate him. How could Brenda be so dumb?

Kathy turned over and punched her pillow angrily. Somewhere in the distance, unaware that the words had suddenly become trenchant with meaning, Dr. McCall sang cheerfully, " 'On the first day of Christmas my true love sent to me. . . . ' "

By the time he reached "three French hens," Kathy was asleep, and her problems of the moment rested with her. As a child she had always slept restlessly on the night before Christmas, but in the last couple of years the holiday excitement was no longer so compelling. Instead of awakening at five-thirty she could dream happily until seven, when the rest of the family usually began to stir.

Seven o'clock on this particular Christmas, however, seemed to come unusually soon. It was pitch-dark outside and the cold was so penetrating that Kathy had

unconsciously hunched up under the blankets when she was awakened by a loud and persistent ringing. Minutes later her father's voice came booming up the stair well. "Hey! Get up, everybody! Double quick!"

It *can't* be morning, Kathy thought drowsily, and turned over without opening her eyes, but suddenly her bedroom door was flung open and her father, wrapped in a plaid bathrobe and roaring like a bonfire, was silhouetted against the hall light. "The furnace is off and it's ten above zero! If we aren't quick about it the orchids will freeze!"

Now Kathy knew what the ringing had been—the alarm bell that alerted the household to just such a disaster. Rolling out of bed she asked sleepily, "What about the electric heaters, Dad?"

"We only have two, and they won't do the job. Get into something warm, all of you, and bring as many car robes and turkish towels as you can find!"

Minutes later a strangely garbed crew assembled in the downstairs hall. Kathy had pulled slacks and a sweater over her pyjamas, then, shivering, had buttoned a pale pink quilted robe on top of everything. Her mother, equally sleep-drugged, was wearing an obviously masculine red plaid lumber jacket over a peach-colored chiffon nightgown, pleated and edged with lace. Jon was wearing ski pants, an Academy letter sweater, and bedroom slippers too small to fit over

his heels; and Per had on the reindeer skin mukluks he used for bedroom slippers, which looked strange indeed beneath a charcoal-gray overcoat with a velvet collar, which Kathy had never before seen.

Dr. McCall, however, was impervious to appearances. He would have accepted his recruits willingly in whatever condition they chose to arrive. Like a major general, he barked orders. "Annette, you can't go outside in that condition. Get a fire going in the living-room fireplace and spread some old sheets or something over the rug. Kathy, see if you can get the furnace people on the phone. I don't care whether it is the middle of the night. Then let me talk to them! Boys, we'll start bringing in plants from the greenhouse, the warm orchids first. They should go nearest the fire. We'll have to cover them carefully and treat them very gently. A good many are in spike."

Fortunately the greenhouse was connected to the kitchen by a short covered passageway, so there were only a few seconds of exposure to the bitter outside temperature. Mrs. McCall not only plugged in the available heaters and started a roaring fire, she lighted the electric oven and all four burners on the stove, so that the kitchen became bearable, even though the door opening and shutting with hasty regularity cooled the room off even more quickly than it heated up. Kathy took pairs of potted plants from the boys and

carefully followed the instructions relayed from her father. "Warm," Per would say, or "medium," or "cool." She ranged the orchids in a deep semi-circle around the fire, putting those demanding warmth closest and letting the more hardy orchids take their chances at the outer edge.

Although Kathy tried to telephone repeatedly, the service division of the oil company supplying the McCalls did not answer. She relayed this information to her father through the boys, who hurried back and forth from greenhouse to kitchen door as fast as their long legs could carry them.

In half an hour, with everyone working at top speed, three hundred orchid pots, draped in towels or blankets for their brief journey through the outdoors, were transferred to the comparative warmth of either the kitchen or the living room. Then, and only then, did Kathy notice that the first pink streamers of a wintry dawn were beginning to appear in the eastern sky.

Mrs. McCall had made a big pot of coffee. Fragrant and steaming, it waited on the stove, but not until the last orchid had been rescued was she allowed to serve it to her husband's chilly helpers. Then, bearing the last huge pot of cymbidiums himself, Dr. McCall finally came back to the house.

The kitchen counter tops were crowded with flower-pots, so he placed his burden tenderly, along with sev-

eral other late-comers, on the floor. Then he went into the living room to inspect the vanguard plants. He picked up first one, then another, feeling the leaves experimentally. Watching her father, Kathy was struck by the smallness of his hands in comparison to his body. He was such a vital, powerful man that the delicacy of his hands was incongruous, yet they conveyed a sense of warmth and sympathy and love.

She smiled at him, and he beamed at her in return. "I think we made it!" he crowed exultantly as his wife, bearing a laden tray for the sustenance of the workers, came trailing down the living-room steps. Suddenly she stopped, glanced at the huddled flowerpots, and burst into laughter. "They look like a semicircle of campfire girls!" she said.

Grinning, Kathy bent to scoop up the nearest pot, and held it forth. "Merry Christmas, anyone?" she inquired.

The inane remark pointed up the absurdity of the whole situation. The serried ranks of clay pots occupied almost all the available floor space, so that the gifts under the tree were quite overshadowed by the incongruous army of orchids. Their own dishevelment equaling the disorder of the living room, the McCall family and Per had to crowd into a corner to drink coffee. Their very closeness seemed to breed an indescribable feeling of conviviality. They smiled and chattered and congratulated one another, as they

sipped the hot liquid, on what was certainly the strangest Christmas morning any of them had ever spent.

"How I'll ever manage to get dinner in that tropical jungle you've made of my kitchen . . ." murmured Mrs. McCall.

"I'm going to have another look at the furnace," Dr. McCall remarked.

Jon trailed after his father, saying, "Maybe it's something simple that's gone wrong."

"Suppose I bring in more wood and start fires in the other fireplaces," Per proposed.

"Heavenly!" said Mrs. McCall. She allowed Kathy to pour her a second cup of coffee, then stepped gingerly over several flowerpots to curl up on the end of the sofa. "The rest of the house will be like a barn."

Kathy discovered a spot where she could sit and toast her toes on the fender. "Let's stay right here until they get it fixed," she whispered, and her mother nodded agreement. "How truly feminine, my sweet!"

There was a good deal of thumping and discussion going on somewhere below, but no sounds of elation indicated that the furnace was responding to the ministrations of either father or son. After about fifteen minutes Jonathan came upstairs and dialed the service department again, waited impatiently, then slammed the receiver back on the cradle and disappeared downstairs once more.

Per, between nursing fires in the bear pit and in the

master bedroom, managed to get dressed, and appeared about seven o'clock looking so elegant that he put Kathy to shame. "Dress in our room," her mother called after her as she sped, shivering, through the hall. "And let me know if I dare."

First Jon, then Dr. McCall, abandoned their efforts in the basement and followed suit. "Such courage," murmured Mrs. McCall, still sitting as close as possible to the living-room fire and showing no inclination to get breakfast for her hungry household. Then, while everyone else seemed to be occupied in either dressing or fire-tending, she unexpectedly got up and hurried down to the furnace room herself, looking both determined and annoyed.

Seconds later there was a muffled bang, a slight explosion, and the oil burner could be heard giving forth its usual comfortable muted roar. When Mrs. McCall appeared in the upstairs hall she was greeted by four surprised people.

"What happened?" her husband asked in astonishment.

Drawing her lumberjacket about her throat in a gesture of regal disdain for masculine inadequacy, the lady of the house assumed a Mona Lisa smile. "I kicked it," she said.

CHAPTER

12

By the time the impulse produced by Mrs. McCall's kick wore off and the furnace balked again, the house was decently warm, breakfast was over, and a service man was on his way. "Operation Orchid having been successful," commented Jonathan, "the family may now proceed to the important business of opening gifts."

Kathy smiled at her brother. This was the old Jon, the boy who joined in rather than the one who stood aside. It was wonderful, she thought, what good sometimes comes from near disaster. It seemed to her that the family was a unit once more, a unit which included Per as well as Jon, and which made the present-opening ritual cozy and delightful.

Everybody took turns, in order to extend the ceremony over as long a time as possible, and it was customary to exclaim over each surprise with as much enthusiasm as though it were one's own. Dr. McCall, as usual, received bunchy-looking, paper-wrapped parcels which to nobody's amazement turned out to be orchid plants in bloom. His wife had given him a *Cymbidium Flirtation*. "Only because I couldn't find a *Cymbidium Matrimony*," she remarked, when he read the tag.

"Is there such a name?" Per asked innocently.

"If there isn't," said Mrs. McCall, "there should be."

Kathy and the boys had pooled their resources to buy a *Habenaria Radiata*, a Japanese orchid they knew the professor coveted, and one of his university colleagues, also an amateur grower, had sent him a *Zygostates Lunata*, a pretty little Brazilian import with upside-down flowers.

"Like bringing coals to Newcastle," murmured Mrs. McCall fondly, but she could see that her husband was truly pleased. In turn she opened several boxes of feminine goodies, as Dr. McCall termed the lacy lingerie she loved. But midway through the opening he said rather sadly, "I'm sorry, dear, but I couldn't get one thing I know you wanted."

Quite happy with her spoils, Mrs. McCall looked up in surprise. "What was that?"

"The perfume you kept mentioning. I asked in several stores, but they didn't have it in, though they said they might be able to order it."

"Perfume?" His wife looked puzzled. "What kind?"

"Italian Bouquet, I think you called it."

Annette burst out laughing. "Darling!" she cried. "That's not a perfume. That's a cookbook! How simply wonderful!"

Per received a hand-knit sweater and a check from his parents, and typically American gifts from all the McCalls. Jon got books, books, and more books, on archaeology, on skin diving, on Florentine architecture, and on the South Seas—a strange but satisfying lot. Last of all he opened the small box from Brenda, while Kathy waited in unconcealable curiosity. As he pulled out a calf billfold he whistled, felt it experimentally, and said, "Genuine leather, made in England! Well, whaddaya know!" With no attempt to pass it around for inspection, he at once tucked it into his pocket, and Kathy was flabbergasted that he showed neither annoyance nor surprise. Her turn came next, but she sat without opening the package handed to her, until finally someone said, "Kathy, wake up!"

"It's something from a boy," her mother said. "I can tell by the way the bow is tied."

Per laughed and said, "*Touché*," while Kathy marveled at the way he could now join in the family fun,

which had seemed so foreign to him a few months ago. He watched with patient interest while she unwrapped a slender volume of verse by New England poets and read the inscription on the flyleaf:

Minstrels for a New England Miss
Affectionately, Per

“How nice!” she said softly. “It’s the first book of poetry anyone has ever given me,” she added. What she didn’t say was that it made her feel very grown-up, because it showed Jonathan that she had acquired a certain stature in Per’s mind.

The “affectionately” was nice too, but Kathy didn’t take it seriously. She felt happy and at ease with Per, and recalled pleasurably standing in the snow last night with her hand tucked through his arm. But she knew too that the affection he felt for her was that which she might have expected from Jonathan—the affection of an older brother for a younger sister whom he understood and enjoyed.

Jon had given her a pair of bright red mittens, warm and pretty but somehow infinitely childish—a reflection of the way he felt about her, Kathy feared. As the day wore on the sense of family unity which had sustained her all morning gradually dissolved. Returning the orchids to the greenhouse became a wearisome

task rather than the crusade of predawn, and when dinner was finished she was so tired that she curled up on the living-room sofa and was soon fast asleep.

The boys had gone ice skating, and her parents were calling on the Walkers next door, so there was no sound in the house but the crackle of the dying fire, when Kathy dreamily became aware of another presence in the room. Subconsciously she stirred, shifted position, and, opening her eyes, looked up in surprise at Rad Cooper, standing above her with Per's book of verse in his hands.

He was reading the inscription on the flyleaf, and his expression was enigmatic. With the firelight flushing his lean, clean-cut features, he looked indefinably attractive—like a portrait of himself, rather than the boy who was editor of the *Orbit* and a friend of Jon's.

"Hello," said Kathy, sitting up. "Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas!" said Rad, idly turning the pages of the book.

"The boys have gone skating," Kathy said, and tried to stifle a yawn.

"Is that intended as a dismissal?"

"No, but I thought—"

"This book is interesting," Rad interrupted. "Per has good taste. Were you reading it when you fell asleep?"

Kathy shook her head.

"Do you like poetry?"

How could she answer? She'd read so little, beyond the required English assignments, that she had no idea whether she liked it or not. "Sometimes," she murmured inadequately.

Rad seemed scarcely to hear. He sank down on the fire stool, still turning pages at random. "I think it's rather curious," he said thoughtfully, "that New England has always been such a fine poetic climate. Whittier, Lowell, Longfellow—and more recently Millay, Frost, MacLeish. Quite an impressive parade!"

Kathy nodded, flattered that he was talking to her as a contemporary, not as Jonathan's kid sister, but nevertheless feeling rather out of her depth.

"Frost's poems are like pictures. Take this one on birches," Rad went on, and started to read in a leisurely, contemplative fashion.

"When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees
I like to think some boy's been swinging them."

His voice was even, almost without inflection, not intruding on the poetry, but separating the words crisply, so that Kathy awakened to the images.

“ . . . Often you must have seen them
 Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
 After a rain. They click upon themselves
 As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
 As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
 Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed
 crystal shells—”

“Listen to this, Kathy: ‘ . . . crystal shells shattering and avalanching on the snow crust—’ Haven't you seen them do exactly that on a winter morning?” Rad looked across at her, his eyes bright with contagious inner excitement.

Kathy nodded again, not hesitantly this time but with enthusiasm. As Rad went on reading she was transported to the country beyond Concord, where they had gone for greens, and she could see the slender white birch trunks arching in the woods.

“ . . . trailing their leaves on the ground
 Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
 Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.”

How remarkable, she thought, that Rad could read words like these so understandingly, so gently, without any feeling that he was sacrificing a jot of his masculinity in doing so. On the contrary, Kathy thought—he

seemed older and wiser than either Per or Jon, because he could feel the thrill of the lovely picture the poem caught.

He read on and on, and she let herself drift on the tide of the words, half listening, half dreaming. How much of the atmosphere of comfort which seemed to enfold her was due to the sound of Rad's voice, how much to the poems themselves, she couldn't guess, so closely did one complement the other. She felt as though time were standing still, as though the glowing fire and the odor of balsam, and the quiet house would be hers forever, as though Rad himself would stay just on the verge of stepping from youth to manhood, as he was in the early dark of this Christmas afternoon.

After a while she got up and switched on a light at his back, then came around and quietly put two more logs on the fire. He didn't thank her, nor did he seem especially aware that she sank down on the hearthrug beside him, hugging her knees and staring into the flames.

There were intervals when he turned the pages without speaking, reading snatches to himself, engrossed until he came to another bit he thought she'd enjoy.

"I've always liked this one by MacLeish," he said after a while.

"Know the world by heart
 Or never know it!
 Let the pedant stand apart—
 Nothing he can name will show it:
 Also him of intellectual art.
 None know it
 Till they know the world by heart.

 Take heart then, poet!"

Shutting the book with a sudden slap, he went over and sprawled on the couch, grinning as though this especially pleased him. "Kathy, do you want to write when you grow up? I do! I'm going to major in journalism in college."

"You mean you want to be a newspaperman?"

"Not necessarily. Who knows?" He chuckled. "Maybe I'll be a poet! But journalism is a good steppingstone to any kind of writing, they say." He tucked his hands behind his head and peered at Kathy's back. "You still haven't answered my question. Do you want to write too?"

"Maybe. I don't know if I'd be good enough," Kathy answered hesitantly, a sense of inadequacy forcing her back into a childish mode of expression.

"You can't find out by not trying," Rad retorted.

"What do you mean?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean," said Rad. "I haven't seen you inside the *Orbit* office in a month. What did those turtles do—give you a trauma or something?"

"What's a trauma?" countered Kathy, swinging around and curling her feet under her pleated skirt.

Rad laughed. "It's a fancy psychological term for an unfortunate mental experience."

"Oh," said Kathy.

"Or is it Jon who's got your goat? Is he still upstaging you?" Rad asked the question with shrewd directness, looking right into Kathy's eyes.

She squirmed, but she felt compelled to be honest. "Maybe it's a little of both," she admitted with a wry smile.

Rad shook his head and sighed. "Kathy, you disappoint me. I can remember you a few years ago, when you were a little kid in grammar school. You were bright as a new penny and gay as a bird, and I'd have sworn you'd never get complexes. Now look at you!"

"What's the matter with me?" Kathy asked.

"That's what I'd like to know. Why can't you forget yourself and get into the act, the way you used to? Where's the old *joie de vivre*?"

Kathy shrugged. She was beginning to squirm again.

"Remember the night of the football dance, when you first had Per in tow? You were having fun, because you had somebody besides yourself to think about. Remember what I told you that night?"

Kathy would never forget, but she couldn't admit it. She lowered her lashes so that she wouldn't have to meet Rad's eyes, and her hair swung against her ears as she shook her head wordlessly.

"I said you'd be a perfectly enchanting woman some day, and I meant it—then!"

Then! Kathy's chin snapped up with such quick indignation that Rad burst out laughing. He was off the sofa in a flash and kneeling beside her, reaching out to take her hands in his. "That's the old spirit!" he crowed. "That's what I like to see. Promise me something?"

Kathy was wary, because he had trapped her. She didn't answer.

"Come back to the *Orbit*," he said persuasively. "Give the thing another whirl. Next year the paper's going to be pretty short of talent. If Jon's editor-in-chief he'll need your help."

Jon—editor-in-chief? Why had it never occurred to her? Yet of course he was Rad's logical successor. But work under Jonathan? The situation was too uncomfortable even to contemplate. Kathy didn't know that her eyes darkened and her jaw tensed at the very

thought, but she was aware that Rad held her hands more tightly when she tried to pull them away.

"Kathy!" Rad spoke just above a whisper. "Do you hate him so very much?"

Hate—that word again. "I don't hate him at all," cried Kathy quickly, and by biting her lip just kept herself from adding, "but he hates me!"

"Then please—please—" Rad begged before breaking off. Implicit in the single repeated word were a great many things they both understood but could not say.

For Kathy the moments that followed could have been a year. The air of the room seemed supercharged, and the fire crackled with explosive violence. She felt as though she were trembling all over, so intensely aware was she of Rad's hands covering hers, and she sensed that they were both friends and enemies, that he was demanding something she could not face. Yet if she refused . . . ?

She would be refusing more than just to make a fresh start. She'd be refusing the possibility of other hours like the one just shared with Rad, when the poetry had woven a net of shared emotion between them. She would also be refusing the sudden overwhelming need for Rad's friendship and approval.

"I—I'll try," she said almost inaudibly.

CHAPTER

13

"This is the first day of my life."

Kathy wrote the sentence in a leather-bound diary her father had given her for Christmas, safe in the knowledge that a miniature key that came with the diary could turn and lock the words away from the world.

Propped up in bed, with lamplight striking the lined pages of the book, and the house noises muted by the closed door, Kathy felt an enormous sense of privacy and release. Although it was barely nine o'clock in the evening, Christmas stretched back endlessly, so that it lost the shape of a normal day and became something out of the ordinary, something so

special that she could read this strange sentence and believe it.

She felt reborn, as though she were coming into existence equipped with an entirely new set of hopes and dreams and desires. Where was the girl who had stood at her bedroom window back in September and called upon childhood to tarry? "I wish we didn't have to grow up," she had complained to Brenda, but now suddenly, miraculously, she was ready to spread her arms and welcome life afresh.

Life—and Rad!

The writing on the page swam and dissolved into the memory of his eyes—such a warm gray, flecked lightly with green. No longer was he the unapproachable public hero, the big man at school, the boy Jonathan most admired. Quite unwittingly, Per had turned Rad into a human being, handing him to Kathy along with the book of verse.

Kathy had never been in love, even casually. She had escaped the fifth-grade crushes in which many of her friends had been trapped, and she had accepted the easy companionship of Steve and other boys her own age without pretending to understand the adult technique of flirtation. Neither uncomfortably shy nor awkward, she was accepted and liked in her group, even though she didn't have the makings of a belle.

But now—*now*—everything was different. Now she

wanted to make Rad proud of her, to become the sort of girl whose company he would seek. It was a large order, but Kathy's eyes were bright with anticipation. She dared hope and plan, because the feeling of rebirth was real. This afternoon there had been an indefinable rapport. . . .

There was a knock at the door. "Kathy!"

She slapped the diary shut. "Come in, Mother."

Her mother closed the door behind her, and whirled before the mirror in a Christmas negligee. "Like it?"

"It's beautiful! Daddy has the most astonishing taste."

"He's a very clever man!"

They both laughed appreciatively, and Mrs. McCall sank down on the foot of her daughter's bed like a schoolgirl longing for a chat. "Nice Christmas?"

"Very!"

The book of poems was lying on the counterpane, and Mrs. McCall reached out and picked it up. "Per was sweet."

Kathy nodded. "And I don't think he was too terribly homesick."

Her mother looked thoughtful. "Though you can't tell. He's so very reserved." Then she glanced at the inscription on the book's flyleaf and added whimsically, "Or was."

"You know, Rad Cooper reads poetry awfully well," Kathy said.

"Does he? He's a very versatile lad."

"He—he's—I think he's more serious than most boys."

"Really?" Mrs. McCall looked surprised. "I should have said he was quite witty and gay."

"Superficially, maybe," said Kathy, out of her new understanding. "But underneath—" She broke off, deliberately leaving the illusion of unplumbed depths.

"I remember how amazed I was to discover that a good many boys like poetry," Mrs. McCall said reminiscently. "There was an Amherst sophomore I used to date at the Cape one summer, and he opened a whole new world for me."

Kathy looked at her mother in astonishment because she had put the experience in quite these words.

"He read Millay and Vachel Lindsay and the younger Negro poets, and it all seemed so terribly exciting. . . ." Annette's voice drifted off and her eyes seemed to be looking back over the years.

"What was his name?" Kathy asked.

"Whose? Oh, Don. Don Mitchell. He was my second love."

It seemed incredible to Kathy to imagine her mother with anyone but her father. "Don Mitchell," she repeated. "I've never even heard you mention him."

Mrs. McCall smiled. "He was rather like Jonnie," she mused. "Terribly intense and unruly. But with a lot of deep-down character. He became an archaeologist and went off to Crete or Thebes or somewhere." She waved a hand vaguely. "You know."

But mention of Jon had made Kathy's mind jump from the distant past to the immediate present. She pushed the little diary down to a place of concealment under the bedclothes beside her and leaned forward. "Mother, don't you think it was very odd for Brenda to give Jon a Christmas present?"

"Did she? I didn't realize—"

"That wallet! I thought he'd be furious, but he didn't even say boo."

"Boo?"

Kathy sighed elaborately. "Don't be obtuse, Mother. You must have noticed the way Brenda's been following him around lately. She sticks to him like glue. But an expensive wallet, and with his initials in gold! Why he can't even take it back!"

"Maybe he doesn't want to take it back," Mrs. McCall suggested mildly.

"Then there's something wrong with all the books on teen-age etiquette. He *should* want to!"

Annette burst out laughing. "Boys are unpredictable," she warned. "Some of them actually *like* to be chased."

"Mother!"

"It's true. I think Jon really needs Brenda's admiration, right now. He's having rather a bad time of things."

"*He's* having a bad time!"

Mrs. McCall nodded vigorously. "That's what you don't realize. He *wants* to be decently pleasant—but he can't, except at rare intervals."

"Why?"

"Because he's cutting himself loose. He's a fledgling, Kathy. All pinfeathers and pride and determination to fly. Poor dear!"

"Poor dear!" repeated Kathy with a different emphasis.

"Be kind!" her mother urged. "Be understanding. You're lucky, pet. You don't have problems like Jonathan."

"Oh no?" Kathy retorted, with a raised eyebrow.

Mrs. McCall chuckled. "Well, at least you're more able to cope. All women are." She got up from the bed and smiled down at her daughter. "I'll tell you a secret. We're the superior sex."

Sweet, nonsensical Mother! Kathy looked after her parent fondly as she sashayed out of the room, but she felt years older in worldly experience, as though she were at the apex of a triangle, and almost everyone

she knew or ever would know was spotted somewhere along the sides.

The feeling, luckily, did not last. By morning she had slipped back into her proper niche once more, and the line in the diary looked ridiculous, so she crossed it out with a heavy pencil that would leave no trace of what she had written.

But in Kathy's heart a certain residue remained. The days slipped by, the new year came along with a three-foot snowstorm, there was skiing on Boston Hill out near Andover and skating on the Academy rink; then the holidays were over and the weeks of classes marched with an even step once more, but nothing was actually quite the same.

A mere glimpse of Rad in the hall made Kathy's heart beat like a trip hammer, and the hours she began to spend in the *Orbit* office became the focal point of her life.

She didn't admit this to anyone—certainly not to Brenda, who had become so enigmatic lately that she could no longer be trusted. To herself, however, Kathy tried to be honest, and discovered that she was enamored with writing as well as Rad.

Was this simply the power of suggestion, she wondered? Did she want to write because he wanted her to?

No, she decided, this was quite an independent in-

terest. It wasn't only writing for the *Orbit* that interested her; it carried over into English class as well and she began to get A's in such rapid succession that it made her head spin with conquest. This was fun!

At night she even scribbled some verse in the pages of her diary, long since abandoned as anything but a notebook. Nothing earth-shattering, just little things, memories of childhood:

Our hollyhocks are high today,
 The sky is pale and far away;
 The trees are very, very tall
 When you are only three feet small.

It scans, she thought, it rhymes, but that's about the sum of it. Nevertheless, she kept on scribbling almost compulsively.

It wasn't until St. Valentine's Day, and then by mere chance, that she had her first date with Rad.

Jon wouldn't even have dignified it by the name of *date*. This she knew, yet it didn't subtract one iota from her enjoyment. It happened this way. Kathy was sitting in the *Orbit* office, rewriting a story on the drama club's coming presentation, when Rad hurried in and slapped his books down on the table. "Mac-

Leish is lecturing on Emily Dickinson at four-thirty in Cambridge. It's open to the public. Want to go?"

Kathy didn't hesitate. "Sure," she said, and ripped the yellow sheet out of the typewriter. "Would it be a story for the *Orbit*?" she asked in an attempt not to sound too anxious.

"Teen-agers Throng Lecture by Popular Harvard Poet?" suggested Rad humorously.

"Two's company but scarcely a throng," admitted Kathy. "Unless we round up the basketball team."

"They never even heard of Emily Dickinson," muttered Rad, as they hurried out of the building.

"To say nothing of Archibald MacLeish," Kathy returned, mildly amused that she herself was not exactly on intimate terms with either.

In the old jalopy that Rad had acquired at the beginning of his senior year, they drove in to Sanders Theater, whose ugliness was only exceeded by its shadowy, balconied charm. By the time they arrived it was already crowded with graduate and undergraduate students, along with a sprinkling of professors and housewives. Squeezing up the stairs, Rad and Kathy found places in the balcony close to the stage, and had scarcely settled down when a slight, baldish man wearing a dark suit and vest walked to the lectern with a young and springy step.

He cleared his throat and began to speak, rapidly

and precisely, about poetry in general and Emily Dickinson's poems in particular. There was much in what he said that Kathy didn't pretend to understand. He talked about the double structure of words as sounds and words as meanings . . . abstractions used as though they were objects . . . Emily's withdrawal, not as a retreat from life, but as an adventure into life. He always called her by her first name, with a feeling of warmth and admiration rather than intimacy, and when he read her shimmering stanzas he never raised his voice, but he made the audience feel the energy of mind and spirit which played one sound against another and juggled the microscopic with the infinite.

Kathy found it was hard work listening. When the lecture was over and the crowd pushed outside, it was quite dark and she was tired. "There's so much I don't know!" she wailed to Rad. "Will I ever be able to learn enough to understand—*really* understand—I wonder?"

Rad smiled down at her. "Remember, most of that crowd were college age or older. Did you get anything out of it at all?"

"Oh, yes!" Kathy breathed. "I'd like to read the rest of her poems."

"There are hundreds," Rad said. "Hundreds and hundreds! She kept them in boxes tied with ribbon. Nobody ever saw them until she was dead."

"How sad!" Kathy exclaimed, as she slipped into the car. She sat thinking for a minute, then announced, "I'll never be a bureau-drawer writer!"

Rad laughed. "That's interesting. It's the first time you've admitted you intend to be a writer at all."

Later, when Rad had dropped her off at the end of the drive and hurried on home to dinner and the usual hours of homework, Kathy pondered her own spontaneous remark. How and when had she reached this momentous decision? She couldn't possibly say. It had crept up on her, with the soft insistence of a stray kitten, until she held out her arms to embrace it, and then all at once it was hers for keeps.

It was late when Kathy pushed open the front door. She could see, in the dining room beyond the hall, that Jon was pouring water and milk and Per was lighting the candles—Kathy's usual jobs.

"Oh, dear!" her mother called. "You're just in time." But Jon looked injured at having had to pinch-hit as helper. "Where've you been?" he asked.

"In Cambridge with Rad."

"With *Rad*? What for?"

"Goodness, you're inquisitive," murmured Kathy, but she saw no reason for keeping the expedition a secret. "As a matter of fact," she said, rather proudly, "we went in to hear Mr. MacLeish lecture on poetry."

Jonathan let out a whoop of astonishment and deri-

sion, but Mrs. McCall, who was just setting a roast of lamb on a silver platter before her husband's place, turned her head and glanced at her daughter. "Why, I think that's lovely," she said.

"Aren't you getting rawther highbrow?" inquired Jonathan, while Per stood by, looking both troubled and sympathetic.

"Oh, Jon, let her alone!" he muttered, in a rare outburst of feeling. "Kathy doesn't tease you if you happen to be interested in something above the level of comic books."

This was so unexpected that the entire family froze in amazement, nobody daring to look at anyone else. Kathy, however, felt secretly overjoyed. Never before had Per leaped to her defense in such a forthright manner and she wondered why he did so now, until she remembered that poetry was an interest he shared and therefore felt called upon to uphold.

Dr. McCall, pulling out his chair, broke the rather strained silence, and asked, with real interest, "Who, in particular, was the lecture about?"

"Emily Dickinson," replied Kathy, without embroidering the statement.

"Oh? She had a very rare talent. Who was it that said of her, 'She sees New Englandly'?"

Kathy repeated this to Rad a few days later, when they were working in the *Orbit* office after the rest of

the reporters had left. She thought it both apt and quaint, and he seemed to share her view. Though he made no comment he sat back and smiled, not so much with his mouth as with his eyes, which could sparkle appreciatively at any unusual turn of phrase.

Under Rad's tutelage, Kathy had started a column called "The Raving Reporter," which was having something of a success. She tackled all sorts of subjects—school spirit, student smoking, Ivy League rejects, cribbing, campus ghosts, and the unscientific American. Sometimes she collected opinions from students and teachers. At other times she found she had enough to say so that she could write an entire column herself. The mental exercise was fun, and she had all sorts of ideas lined up for the future, neatly written down on the back page of the loose-leaf notebook which was an inseparable companion of every Academy girl or boy.

Consulting this list now, she crossed out one which seemed extraneous, then considered it lingeringly, because it was an old idea of hers which still seemed too good to discard. "What would you think of a feature story about the beatnik joints that are growing up around Harvard Square?" she asked.

Rad chewed a pencil and looked thoughtful. "If we could get an Academy angle it might be O.K.," he

said. "Do any of the fellows ever go there, I wonder, or is it only the university crowd?"

"We could inquire around," Kathy suggested.

"We could, but why don't you?" Rad suggested with a grin.

Making a little circle of her thumb and forefinger, in imitation of a favorite gesture of Jonathan's, Kathy nodded, then turned back to the typewriter.

But Rad continued chewing his pencil with a contemplative air. "Say," he burst forth finally, "would you like to go to the basketball game with me Friday night? I thought I'd ask a gang to come back to our house afterwards."

Kathy could scarcely believe her ears. Her fingers, arrested on the typewriter keys, felt suddenly cold, and it took great self-control to turn and say calmly, yet with a nice degree of enthusiasm, "That sounds like fun."

"Swell. I'll stop by around seven-thirty."

Kathy nodded. "I'll be ready." But although she forced herself to go on typing she had to rewrite the story again later, because nothing she put down made very good sense.

A *real* date with Rad, at last! It seemed almost too good to be true. Could he guess how delighted she was, Kathy wondered? She tried very hard to stay calm and collected, but she felt like dancing and sing-

ing from sheer excitement. Let Jonathan snicker now!

She walked home on winged feet, floating several inches above the pavement, and was delighted that she found her mother alone, polishing silver in time to music from the record player.

Depositing her books on a hall chair, Kathy burst into the kitchen. "Mother, I need a new dress," she said without preliminaries. "I need a new dress *desperately!*"

"Really? Are you being presented at court?"

"Better!"

"Tell me!" demanded Mrs. McCall, amused by her daughter's jubilation.

"Promise you won't discuss it with the boys?"

"Cross my heart!"

"I've got a date with Rad Cooper for Friday night and I simply haven't a thing fit to wear."

"Of course you haven't," said Mrs. McCall promptly. "You *deserve* a new dress. Come to think of it, so do I. Let's go shopping tomorrow afternoon."

"But suppose there are alterations." Kathy couldn't help worrying, because it was so all-important for everything to be right.

"Poof! There won't be," said her mother with certainty. "You can step right into a size eleven without even taking up the hem."

"Could we try Bonwit's in the junior section?"

"We could!"

Kathy threw her arms around her mother, who was sitting on a stool in front of the counter, and snuggled her nose into the nape of her neck, where the hair curled upward. "Oh, Mother, you *are* wonderful!" she cried.

The shopping expedition proved to be a lark. It was one of those days when everything was easy, when it wasn't a case of finding something possible, but a question of how to decide between two absolutely perfect dresses, equally becoming and inexpensive.

With motherly indulgence, Mrs. McCall suggested, "Let's take both!" But Kathy, with practicality and foresight, demurred. "No, I'd rather have something new in the spring," she decided. "Around Easter or even graduation time."

They settled on a rosy red sheer wool, full-skirted, with a simple shirtwaist top. Late Friday afternoon Kathy washed her hair, manicured her nails, and primped as though she were going to a ball instead of a basketball game in the Academy gym.

So well did she keep the secret of her evening engagement, however, that although Jonathan whistled and said, "Something new has been added," when she wore the red dress down to dinner, he didn't vaguely

suspect that Rad's arrival at the house concerned anyone but him.

"Hi, boy," he said when he happened to answer the bell. "C'mon in. What brings you here at this hour of the stilly night. Problems?"

"Not that I know of," said Rad with a grin.

Kathy came into the hall, stopped at the stairs before she ran up to her room, and called, "Hi, Rad. I'll be down in just a sec."

But once alone in the upper hall, she covered her mouth with her hands and began to laugh helplessly. Never, she thought—never to the very end of her days—would she forget the look of utter stupefaction on her brother's face!

CHAPTER



14

Sitting in the temporary bleachers erected in the gymnasium, Kathy felt that she could ask no more of life. To be Rad Cooper's girl, even for an evening, she considered a rare privilege, and the new dress gave her the extra modicum of self-confidence she needed to hold her head high, and at the same time keep her feet on the ground.

She tried, in all modesty, to make herself small and self-contained, but she felt as showy as one of the bright-plumaged cock pheasants which came each winter morning to the McCalls' garden, where the lawn was regularly sprinkled with cracked corn.

Her pride was more than that of being seen with Rad; Kathy found real pleasure in his company. Of

course she would have been less than feminine had she not enjoyed the surprised expression she saw on the face of Brenda, who was sitting opposite with a group of Fourth Form girls. Tomorrow, Kathy was sure, she would get a morning telephone call, and she could almost hear her friend's excited words. What happened? How did you wangle it? Give!

From her exalted position at Rad's right hand, however, this inevitable probing seemed like superficial nonsense. How could she explain that this meant more—much more—than a date with a prominent senior? Rad was important in school, it was true, but he was even more important as a person, with his sympathetic turn of mind, his nice sense of humor and—yes!—his understanding heart. All these qualities Kathy had discovered gradually as they worked together in the *Orbit* office. She had felt their friendship growing, nourished by congenial tastes, until now they were at ease with each other, even in the all-too-public glare of the gym.

Kathy didn't try to flirt, as Brenda undoubtedly would have. She really liked basketball, so she watched the game closely, and during the first half Rad and she discussed the players and the Academy's chances of winning. The second half was hard-fought, and the home team's supporters cheered lustily, until finally, in the fourth quarter, the game was tied.

Carla Standish, sitting in the same row as Rad and Kathy, was almost beside herself with excitement, because Sam Carr was playing forward and she felt that now he had a marvelous chance to distinguish himself. "Sam!" she called, her black eyes snapping and her hands megaphoning her words. "Sam! Go to it. Fight!"

Although her cry was barely audible in the general din, Sam fought, but it was the tall Academy center who actually shot the winning basket a second before the final whistle. This brought the stands to their feet in a shout of victory. Rad whooped along with the rest, and grabbed Kathy's hand to pump it up and down in congratulation. Then he hurried her through the crowd to the cold outdoors, so that they could get to his house before the guests arrived.

Until tonight Kathy had never met Rad's parents. They were older than she expected, plain as the figures in a Grant Wood painting but unexpectedly jaunty. At once Kathy could see that Rad had inherited his sense of humor, because Mr. Cooper had twinkly eyes and Mrs. Cooper's thin mouth turned up at the corners, as though she was ready to laugh at the slightest provocation or none at all.

They made Rad's friends as welcome as though the party had been their idea, as perhaps it was, and managed to give the girls the comforting feeling of being

chaperoned but not fussed over. In an upstairs bedroom Kathy powdered her nose, red as a strawberry from the nippy winter air, and ran a comb through her hair, which crackled and flew every which way, supercharged with electricity. While she was vainly trying to bring it under control, Liz Compton and Carla came in together. Liz greeted her with faint surprise, but Carla, who had seen her with Rad earlier, was pleasantly casual. "Didn't Sam play a wonderful game?" she asked, as though the winning basket had been his after all.

"Marvelous." Kathy nodded, and turned from the mirror to give Liz her place.

Liz took a lipstick from her purse. "Where's Per?" she asked, as she retouched her make-up. "I didn't see him downstairs."

"He went to the pops concert with a Swedish friend who's studying at Harvard," Kathy replied.

"Kathy's with Rad tonight," explained Carla helpfully.

"Oh?" Liz eyed Kathy in the mirror with new interest, but she was experienced enough to conceal any surprise. "Well, are we all presentable?" she asked after a moment. "Let's go down."

In the big, tile-floored playroom, half a level below the first floor, Rad had started the record player and set up a soft-drink bar. Almost at once the room seemed to fill, but for the first half hour, in spite of Rad's sup-

port, Kathy felt like a fish out of water. These people were his friends—all Fifth or Sixth Formers. There wasn't an underclassman in sight.

Rad said, "Come help me open root beers, Kathy," but Buzz Campbell, in a misdirected effort to be masculine and aggressive, took the bottle opener away from her.

"Here, let me do that," he insisted. "This isn't a girl's job."

Several couples were dancing, another group had organized a dart game, and two seniors whom Kathy didn't know were sitting on a couch talking and holding hands. Somehow, glancing around the room and smoothing the skirt of the red dress with moist palms, she lost the sense of assurance that had sustained her earlier in the evening. For a few minutes her poise was shaken. She felt too young for this group.

Then she remembered the expression in Liz's eyes, upstairs—a fleeting glance closely akin to respect. She stopped stroking her dress and stood quiet and dignified, waiting for Rad.

He rescued her within minutes, even though Buzz protested, and they danced to music by a popular trio, but soon had to stop to select some records to replace the first batch. Then, in spite of whistles and come-hither gestures from Buzz, Rad danced with Kathy around the room once more.

Over his shoulder, quite without warning, she saw

Brenda and her brother coming down the stairs, and she was swept by astonishment coupled with relief that at least there would be one other girl of her own age group. But how had it happened? Brenda had been at the gym with a crowd of her classmates, not with Jon.

Then it occurred to Kathy that Jon had picked her up and brought her over after the game. It was natural for Jonathan to have been invited to Rad's party, but she would have expected him to bring Liz Compton or one of the other girls he usually dated. Not Brenda—certainly not Brenda, when he obviously couldn't have asked her until the very last minute! But here they were.

An easy and cordial host, Rad made them welcome and relieved Buzz behind the improvised bar. "Coke, root beer, ginger ale?"

"Ginger ale, please," Brenda said, and fluttered her curly lashes agreeably. It seemed to Kathy that she was almost ready to purr, so pleased with herself did she appear.

Jonathan, however, looked rather sullen. "Nothing for me," he said in an offhand manner, and turned to see who was over at the dart board. A few minutes later he moved away, making no effort to include Brenda, and managed to get in on the next game.

Kathy looked after her brother with a frown, but Brenda's smile didn't falter. She danced with Buzz,

who stepped all over her feet as thoroughly as he had over Kathy's on the night of the football dance, but still she kept the happy, entranced expression that signifies a girl is having a lovely time.

Brenda is clever, thought Kathy, as she watched her. She's also getting prettier by the minute. The Christmas-angel look—the round-eyed innocence—was changing subtly. She had more color in her cheeks, more light in her eyes, so that she looked expectant, as though tomorrow—or maybe even tonight—life was bound to turn out to be simply wonderful!

Rad went upstairs for some trays of sandwiches his mother had waiting in the kitchen, and left Kathy in charge of the soft drinks, so when Buzz finally relinquished Brenda, she called, "Come help me tend bar!"

Brenda came at once, smiling, and several of the older boys discovered that they were suddenly thirsty, and crowded around her, laughing and joking. They treated her like a new discovery and kept plying her with inanities. "Where have you been hiding, kitten? Don't tell me you've been around the Academy all this year!"

Kathy looked on, interested rather than jealous, while her best friend parried the thrusts with astonishing tact. She didn't make her admirers feel inferior, nor did she seem to be flirting conspicuously. If Jonathan looked her way she would show him that she was no wallflower, but she kept a nice balance in her repar-

tee, and none of the older girls could possibly criticize her for being either forward or brash.

As Rad came gingerly down the stairs, bearing heaping plates of ham and cheese sandwiches, Kathy's attention shifted to her brother, whose voice rose above those of the other dart throwers. He seemed to be playing as though his life depended on the game, but then she realized that at the slightest opportunity his glance flicked in the direction of the bar.

Was he jealous of Brenda, whom he had deserted? It would serve him right! But Kathy could sense that he was watching the pair of them equally, and she knew that he was encountering a situation he wasn't prepared to handle. Jon's intellectual ability might be enviable, but he had never been very perceptive socially.

Rad plunked the platters down on the counter. "Come and get it, everybody!" he called. Behind him Buzz shouted, "Doughnuts coming," and staggered across the room, clowning, with two more heaping plates.

The dart throwers straggled over, Jonathan bringing up the rear, hands in his pockets, a scowl on his face. He ignored Kathy, but accepted a Coke from Brenda, who smiled imperturbably and murmured, "I hope you won."

"Who else?" Jon roared, pounding his chest with a

clenched fist. But aside from Brenda, nobody seemed to be looking his way.

Kathy could feel the atmosphere change, as Jon's resentment became almost tangible. Whenever Rad moved close or spoke to her, she realized that her brother stiffened. It reminded her of the day of the picnic, when to a lesser degree she had harbored a similar rancor. Jonathan felt that Rad's interest in his kid sister was a betrayal of friendship. This was as clear as though the accusation had been written in crayon on the playroom wall.

Kathy's reaction, at Thanksgiving time, had been passive. Jon's was active. He began to snort like a bull in a china shop, making remarks in a loud and belligerent tone of voice, and trying to attract attention from anybody and everybody. Brenda, looking patient but wary, caught Kathy's eye, and Kathy shook her head ever so slightly, to indicate she didn't understand.

Rad simply looked surprised. He didn't know how to account for Jon's sudden reversion to grammar-school big-shot tactics, but he maintained the hands-off policy of the proper host. Kathy, however, felt both ashamed and attacked. Jon was spoiling the evening deliberately, ruining the lovely party which could have been such fun.

The Sixth-Formers tried to ignore his antics, but he wouldn't let them. Brandishing a bottle of pop, he

shouted like a drunkard. "A buck says there's not a one of you can lick me at a game of darts!" He even reached into his hip pocket and slapped a crumpled dollar bill on top of the bar.

There were no takers. Everyone seemed suddenly absorbed in conversation, Brenda with Buzz, Liz with Rad and Sam. Out of the corner of her eye Kathy could see her brother glance around with growing truculence. Oh Jonathan, she wanted to cry, stop making a fool of yourself!

She was at once furious and deeply sorry for him, because he obviously had arrived at a position from which there was no turning back. Brenda was now looking at him with real concern, and Rad was wiping the damp bar top with a towel.

This was like waving a red flag at a bull as far as Jon was concerned. With a poor pretense of impishness he put his thumb over the top of his pop bottle, shook it vigorously, and spurted the fizzing liquid in the wake of Rad's cloth.

This was too much for Kathy. "Jonnie!" she cried, using the old diminutive unconsciously.

"What are you trying to be—funny?" Buzz asked.

Jon glared at his sister first, then at Buzz, and finally at Brenda, who was looking more puzzled than dismayed. He swayed back and forth on his heels in a kind of torment, and Kathy realized with a shock that

his emotions had skidded quite out of control. She gave one quick, beseeching glance toward Rad, but unfortunately his back was toward her. Something must be done—and done quickly! But what?

The answer came, like the unexpected firing of a rocket, from Jonathan himself. Brenda's expression he apparently took as the ultimate insult. "Whatsa-matter?" he asked. "Don't you like it, Brenda? Don't you like the way I'm acting either? Well, isn't that just too bad!"

And he shook his half-empty pop bottle and squirted a stream of fizzy liquid deliberately in her pretty face.

Kathy gasped, and started around the corner of the bar, then stopped, horrified. Brenda was too surprised to speak. She picked up the damp towel Rad had abandoned and carefully wiped the sticky soda off her face and blouse. Then, slowly, a scarlet stain moved up her neck to her cheeks.

"Why, Brenda!" Jonathan croaked. "You're mad. You know I was only fooling!" He spoke like a sleep-walker jerked rudely awake.

Brenda walked out from behind the bar and across the room without looking in Jon's direction. She didn't even seem aware that Kathy, Rad, and Buzz all hurried after her. But the click of her heels on the stairs sounded like pistol cracks in the suddenly quiet room.

CHAPTER

15

A crack of light showed under the door of her parents' bedroom when Kathy reached home, but the bear pit was dark. Either Per and Jon were already asleep or they were not yet in.

"Kathy?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Have a good time, dear?"

Of course her mother would want to know. Hadn't the red dress been bought for the occasion? But Kathy stopped in the hallway hesitantly, biting her lip.

"Come tell me about it!" called Mrs. McCall enthusiastically. "Daddy's still at the lab and I've been reading, trying to stay awake until you came in."

Kathy pushed open the door reluctantly, and closed

it slowly behind her. Her mother, propped up on pillows, turned a half-finished novel face down on the blanket. "Why, darling, what happened?" she asked with instant perception, and patted the bedclothes in a gesture of invitation.

"Are the boys home?" Kathy asked.

"Not yet."

Kathy moved over and sat down on the bed, but she didn't curl her feet under her, as she usually did. Her back felt stiff and her legs dangled like a doll's, not quite reaching the floor. She looked down at her feet miserably and didn't know what to say.

"Was Rad . . . difficult?"

"Oh, no! Rad is wonderful," Kathy cried at once, and all of a sudden the need to confide was too much to be borne. "It was Jon. He simply ruined the evening, for everybody! Oh, Mother, why is he such a dope?"

Mrs. McCall made a sound between a moan and a chuckle. "This is a switch," she remarked. "Usually it's Jon despairing of you—"

"Let me tell you!" Kathy cried, and anger flared up again irrepressibly. She gave a detailed description of her brother's actions at the Coopers' and was relieved to see that her mother looked suitably appalled.

"Goodness, how did Brenda get home?"

"Buzz took her. Not then. Later. Brenda deserves to be popular, Mother. She washed up in the bath-

room, then came downstairs again, smiling. And she pretended to Mr. and Mrs. Cooper that it was just an accident."

"Good for Brenda," said Mrs. McCall, nodding. "What about Jon?"

"Oh, he tried to make amends," Kathy admitted, "but it was too late." She sat frowning and twisting her hands together for a minute, then added, "I felt sorry for him, in a way. But what would make him want to do such a thing?"

"I don't think he *wanted* to, darling." Mrs. McCall spoke slowly and thoughtfully. "I think it was more like an explosion of feeling he couldn't control."

"But why? Why should he be mad at Brenda?"

"Oh, I don't think it was Brenda at all. I think he was furious at you."

"Me?" Yet even through her surprise Kathy remembered that it was herself Jon had seemed to be watching when presumably he was absorbed by the dart game.

"Because you've upset his applecart. Because you've stolen Rad."

"Oh, Mother, don't be silly!"

But Mrs. McCall said, "Think about it. Jonnie has always regarded his friendship with Rad as one of the big things in his life. Rad is older, Rad is boss, Rad is just about perfect—or was, until . . ." Characteristi-

cally, she left the sentence uncompleted, while she wriggled to an upright position and leaned forward, elbows on knees. "Poor Jon just can't understand how Rad could possibly get interested in a dopey little kid like you!"

Kathy trembled between indignation and amusement. Then both she and her mother began to laugh, and Kathy found herself gasping, "I can't understand it myself, but I think it's lots of fun."

Her mother reached out, and patted Kathy's clasped hands. "Of course it's fun. And it's just what Jon needs. He's got to grow up, some day!"

Kathy laughed even harder. "Where have I heard that before?" she asked.

A door clicked shut downstairs and Annette said, "Sh!" like a conspirator. Then she whispered, "We'll have to be very, very kind to him, honey, for the next few days. Because he's going to feel terribly ashamed."

To be kind, Kathy knew, meant to act as though nothing had happened. This was not hard to do, since she scarcely saw her brother all the next day. In the morning he went to the library to do some research on a term paper, then avoided lunching with the family by claiming to have an ice-skating date at noon. A strange time to be going ice skating, everyone thought, but made no comment, so Jon escaped until dinner-time.

Then he slipped into his place and unfolded his napkin with unusual deliberation, avoiding the eyes of everyone but Per, who was presumably innocent of any overt critical attitude. His father, as it happened, was also uninformed, and he was feeling particularly amiable as he served the Boston baked beans and brown bread traditional for Saturday night supper in New England.

"Let's play group nouns," he suggested. "I heard a good one today—a benevolence of bishops."

"Why not a beatitude of bishops?" asked Mrs. McCall.

"Try to get one for gypsies," Kathy broke in. "I understand the queen of the gypsies is in the hospital here for an operation and her followers have all moved in and are camping all over the halls."

"A likely tale," her father chuckled. "Gypsies. Now let me see. . . ."

"A conflagration of gypsies?" his wife proposed, but everyone vetoed this. "Too difficult to say."

"My favorite has always been a gimble of salesgirls," murmured Mrs. McCall, undaunted.

"A calamity of gypsies?" suggested Kathy.

"That's not bad."

"I thought of one this morning when I was watching the birds on the lawn," Per said. "A plump of pigeons."

"Good boy!" said the professor in quick praise. "One of these days you'll have people believing English is your native tongue." He turned to his son. "What have you got to say for yourself, fellow?"

Jonathan started and flushed. "I wasn't really listening," he muttered. "Try something more in my line."

"O.K. Beatnik." His father grinned.

"A bearding of beatniks," cried Kathy at once, but nobody would buy this one.

"It just doesn't have the proper ring," Mrs. McCall said.

"A bristle of beatniks?" tried Per, and everyone clapped, but agreed it didn't tell the full story.

"A distemper of beatniks, maybe," murmured Jonathan.

"Then you lose the alliteration," his mother complained. "A brew?"

"A backsliding, a babble, a balderdash?" questioned Dr. McCall.

"Balderdash isn't bad," Kathy said, "but I think distemper is better."

Her brother glanced across the table in grateful surprise. "It doesn't have to be alliterative, does it, if the idea's good?"

But although words now tumbled forth from one member of the group after another, the truly apt phrase remained evasive. Wait until I do my *Orbit*

story on the coffeehouses in Harvard Square, Kathy thought, but said aloud, "Wait till next week. Maybe I can come up with something really keen then."

"Beatniks aren't keen. They're fuzzy," her father reminded her. "They *like* to live in alleys and buy coal by the bucket and pretend that riches are the road to ruin, don't they?"

"Ask me later," Kathy advised with a laugh, as she got up to help clear the table. "I intend to become an authority!"

This was no idle boast. She had discovered, through the inquiring around that Rad had suggested, that coffeehouse crawling was becoming a popular sport among certain Academy irregulars. There was definitely a feature story here worth writing, but Kathy's problem was still far from simple. Who would take her on a tour of the "joints"?

Normally she might have pressed Per into service, though he certainly would have looked out of place among a group of unshaven, unpressed, long-haired nonconformists. Kathy chuckled at the mere thought. As it happened, however, the homework load for both boys was becoming heavier and heavier. As March roared into New England and second-term exams approached, the eyes of all Fifth and Sixth Formers began to acquire a glazed though studious stare.

Tonight, Saturday, she might have snared half a

dozen escorts, but unfortunately tonight would not do. She understood from reliable sources that on Saturday the onslaught of the college crowd resulted in a hasty retreat of the "beats," who came out of hiding only on week nights, when the coast was comparatively clear.

The *Orbit* was put to bed regularly on Wednesday, so that left Monday and Tuesday for Kathy to acquire the story she had so blithely promised Rad last week, in her first upswing of self-confidence. I'll get Steve, she decided. He ought to be glad to help me, after the bum steer he gave me on that turtle thing.

But although she telephoned as soon as the dishes were cleared away, there was no answer. She repeated the call the next morning, but apparently the entire Whitely family had gone off for the week end. The telephone seemed to be ringing in an empty house. Reluctantly, Kathy had to promise herself to approach him first thing Monday morning. Until then nothing could be done.

The hours after Sunday dinner dragged. Kathy finished her homework by midafternoon, washed her hair, and sat listening to an assortment of popular and classical records until it dried. Still it was only four-thirty, and since the days were getting longer, she felt restless. What could she do until suppertime?

From force of habit she decided to walk over to Brenda's. Sooner or later she knew they'd get together

and discuss the party at Rad's, and with typical forthrightness Kathy decided to take this particular bull by the horns.

Brenda, who had also given herself a Sunday afternoon shampoo, was sitting in the middle of her bedroom floor looking top-heavy with rollers, which made improbable clumps out of her fair hair. She was turning the pages of an old photograph album, and she didn't seem in the least surprised to see Kathy appear in the doorway.

"Come look at these snapshots of all of us playing 'Lay, Sheepie,' " she invited Kathy. "They're a hoot."

They were indeed. At ten both Brenda and Kathy had been as plump as butterballs, while Jonathan had been skinny and short beside them, in spite of his treasured fourteen months of seniority. Steve Whitely was in one of the pictures, looking timid as a mouse, and Buzz, who appeared in several, had not yet acquired his football player's bulk, although his feet looked positively grotesque.

"I'll bet he wore size eleven, even then," Brenda giggled. "No wonder he steps all over you."

"I'll let him step on my feet any time, after Friday night," Kathy retorted. "I think he was simply wonderful about everything."

"He was," Brenda agreed. "He's a swell guy, actually. Just not very exciting, somehow."

Kathy turned another page of the album. Here they were at sailing camp on Cape Cod—Brenda and herself, along with half a dozen other girls whose names she could barely remember. "That was the summer you got the measles," she remarked with a smile. "I can still see you coming out all over in spots."

"I was so homesick. I hated camp!"

Kathy nodded. "And I thought you'd love it, because I did. Vermont was murder, but I loved the Cape. But the day you got the measles you said you'd never forgive me. I was terribly hurt."

Brenda giggled. "You got over it."

"So did you."

The years were erased and the girls were best friends again, quarreling and making up and promising always to tell each other everything. "Everything!" Kathy had insisted, and crossed her heart to seal the bargain.

"Brenda," she said suddenly. "'I'm terribly sorry about Friday night. Jonnie acted like a—a boor.'"

Brenda leaned back on her elbows and nodded slowly. "He sure did. I ought to teach that big lug a lesson—and fast!"

Kathy laughed. "It's awfully hard to look Machiavelian in those curlers," she remarked. "But what did you have in mind?"

Shrugging, Brenda looked curiously unresentful.

"Nothing, actually." She paused, then added confidentially, "If it were anybody else I'd simply call it a day. Say good-by, brother, and mean it. But with Jonnie—" She shook her head and sighed, then admitted rather despondently, "Kathy, I like Jon."

If she had said this a month ago Kathy would have bridled and felt uncomfortable and even resentful, but the party at Rad's had somehow pulled them together once more, so that they could talk to each other as they had in the old days. The photograph album lay neglected between them, but it gave impetus to the discussion that followed. "I can't understand why," Kathy murmured, "after Friday night."

"Friday night was bad," Brenda acknowledged. "But something was eating Jon. He wasn't like himself at all."

"Mother thinks he was mad at me—because of Rad."

"Could be," Brenda agreed. "You were kind of edgy about Jon and me until lately. Maybe jealousy runs in the family, or something," she added with a grin.

Jealousy—Kathy had never thought of her attitude in quite this way, but Brenda had a point. Jealousy could well have been at the root of Jonathan's pique. She wriggled around and lay flat on the floor on her stomach, flipping the pages of the photograph album without even glancing at the contents. Jealousy—it

was a destructive emotion, one she was ashamed to have nurtured even for a brief time.

But Brenda misinterpreted her silence. "I'm sorry," she apologized. "I was just trying to be funny. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings—again."

At this oblique reference to the summer at sailing camp both girls burst out laughing. "You haven't," Kathy assured her. "I was just thinking—you could be right."

"Rad and Jon are actually a lot alike," said Brenda, surprisingly.

"Rad—and—Jon?"

Brenda began unpinning the rollers and dropping them in her lap, so that when she nodded the fat blond curls danced up and down. "They're both bright," she said, "and sort of impatient."

"Oh, I don't know that Rad's impatient," Kathy protested quickly. "In comparison to Jonnie he's as stable and calm as Plymouth Rock."

"Is Plymouth Rock calm?" Brenda giggled. "Anyway, he's a year older. Next year Jon will settle down a bit too."

"You seem awfully sure of things."

"I am," Brenda replied. "I've been making a study of boys this year."

"So that's why you're not on the Honor Roll!"

Kathy cried in pretended surprise. "Or have I missed something? Is it a new course?"

"You haven't missed a thing, Kathy dear," said Brenda sweetly. "And I think working on the *Orbit* has been the greatest! Honestly I do."

"Speaking of the *Orbit*, how would you like to go take a peek at some of the Harvard Square coffeehouses tomorrow night with Steve and me and anybody else we can scare up?" Kathy suggested. "I want to do a feature, and your viewpoint might come in handy. Who knows?"

But Brenda shook her head. "Beards aren't in my line. Besides, I have a French quiz first period Tuesday morning. Oops!"

Kathy teased her as she got to her feet to leave. "A greasy grind, that's what you're developing into. Never mind. We'll muddle along without you." She waved a hand. "Don't come down. I can let myself out."

"O.K. 'By."

"'By now."

Walking home, Kathy decided it had been an oddly successful visit. All the strain which had impaired their relationship during the past months had relaxed as soon as they had started to discuss the boys. They were back on the old basis—friendly, casual, teasing. It made her feel good.

Now the thing uppermost in her mind was to get in touch with Steve Whitely, but again the phone rang fruitlessly, and the next morning he didn't show up for chapel, nor did he appear in any of the classes they had together during the day. In the afternoon Kathy learned that the entire family had gone to Illinois to attend Steve's grandfather's funeral, and were not expected back in town before Thursday at the earliest.

There was an early evening meeting of the Inter-scholastic Press Association, to which Rad and Jon were both going, so that let them out. Halfheartedly, Kathy tried to interest a couple of other Fourth Form boys in her project, but both proved to be in Brenda's French section, and begged off on the valid excuse that Mrs. Dujardin could dream up a mean quiz.

I suppose I may as well skip the whole thing, Kathy decided after dinner, and started off to return a book to the library, then suddenly changed her mind. Why shouldn't I go alone, she asked herself. Certainly anybody's entitled to drop in at a restaurant and buy a cup of coffee or a bottle of Coke. Besides, it might be sort of an adventure. And it would certainly give me an idea of how a real reporter feels!

CHAPTER

16

The fact that it was not yet dark when the bus dropped her at the magazine stand in Harvard Square gave Kathy courage. She knew the names of several of the *espresso* shops said to be the hangouts of the beatnik crowd—the Café Mozart, Tula's Coffee Grinder, the Pamplona, and others. They were all within a few blocks of one another and certainly wouldn't be too hard to find.

She went to a telephone booth and looked up the addresses, settling on the nearest, which proved to be in a dismal corner building with dingy curtains at the windows and paint peeling in long ragged streamers from the recessed door.

It looked so completely unappetizing that she

walked back and forth several times before she could bring herself to the point of going inside. Then it was only because two tall lads with Harvard green book bags turned and stared at her in amusement that she decided she would be less conspicuous at a quiet table than prowling up and down the brick-paved street.

Defiantly, she pushed open the door and stepped into an interior so dim that the one spot of light seemed to come from the chromium *machina*, which Kathy correctly supposed must be used to brew the bitter black Italian coffee usually preferred by the "beats."

She put the word in quotation marks in her mind, but she decided not to use them in the story which she was already beginning to plan as she made her way timidly to a scarred and spotty table safely off the line of march from the door. The proprietor looked at her with a raised eyebrow and sauntered over. "Anything I can do for you?"

"I'd like a cup of *espresso*, please." Kathy's voice sounded high and squeaky in her own ears. She hadn't intended to ask for coffee, but somehow soft drinks seemed inappropriate to this hide-out, although she knew that no intoxicants other than conversation were to be had.

Now that her eyes were becoming accustomed to the gloom, she could make out a group of silent kibitzers leaning close to a pair of chess players in a far corner.

Toward the center of the room were several empty tables, but back toward the windows an earnest, unsmiling couple were leaning together and arguing in a completely audible tone about Communism. He was apparently for it, she against, although to Kathy the pale-faced, black-clad girl looked too listless to take a stand on anything. She sat with her elbows on the paint-smeared table and waited for a pause in her companion's argument, then whined loudly that this was all very well, but wasn't he missing the meaning of life?

Kathy was fascinated. As soon as the waiter had brought her the conventional cup of *espresso*, she pulled a pencil and folded sheet of paper out of her coat pocket and began to take notes.

Dirty aprons

New beards.

Look up Sam Johnson's coffeehouses and compare.

Chess. Very earnest.

Communism—yes. Poetry? Politics?

Check how these places ever make any money.

She put the list away, took a tentative sip of the strong coffee, and unconsciously made a face.

Two pallid youths in turtle-neck sweaters and sneakers padded in from the outer world, glanced at Kathy

in dismayed astonishment, and continued through the maze of tables to an unoccupied spot against the wall, which was decorated by a series of really appalling cracks, as though a bad artist had tried to paint an impressionistic mural representing poverty. One pulled a notebook out from under his sweater and started to read, quite audibly,

“Crying, midnight, black,
Murderous the chick’s repeal,
Bird wings on a pillow,
Naked and shivering feathers
In a cloud of fish.”

Kathy pulled out her notes again and added, “Beat poets recite beat poems.” Then she put a quarter on the table, to cover the price of the unpalatable coffee and leave something extra for a tip, and went out quickly.

Well, that wasn’t too bad, she thought, as she walked toward the next address on her list—very informative. Of course, it was a good deal like going slumming, but now that she was once more in the twilit familiarity of the Square she felt entirely safe.

Already she was planning a lead: “Beards and Blank Verse in Beat Coffeehouses.” How would that be? Of course to get an angle for the *Orbit* she should be

able to report having run into some students from the Academy or another secondary school in the vicinity, but in lieu of an actual eyewitness account she could always use the covering phrase, "It is reported that—"

Dusk was falling fast now. Far in the distance the river glinted in the afterglow, as Kathy turned a corner and peered down an alley to an even more depressing façade.

But her first experience had made her bold. Now she didn't hesitate; she walked briskly through the worn door into an interior which differed from the other only slightly. It was smaller and more crowded, and there was a tall young man with a red beard who was standing with one foot on a chair, listlessly plucking a guitar. But it contained the same gleaming *machina*, the same dim bulbs hanging from the ceiling, and the same stained tables and rickety chairs.

Blinking, Kathy tried to locate an inconspicuous spot where she might settle for a few minutes, but this time the crowd made it more difficult. Only a few of the ancient ice-cream-parlor tables were unoccupied.

Now she began to feel as exposed as though she were walking down a church aisle in her pyjamas, trapped in a dream. To this crowd she must look ridiculous, yet it was too late to turn back. Quickly she hurried to the nearest empty table, trying to ignore the slow turning of heads, the apathetic or contemptuous or

sullen glances. If only Steve were here!

But she had chosen to brazen this out alone, and after all, there was no reason why anybody—*anybody*—shouldn't walk into a public place and order a cup of—

"What'll it be?" asked a surly voice at her elbow.

"A ginger ale," murmured Kathy, barely above a whisper. She couldn't face another cup of that horrid black *espresso*. Even the odor she found nauseating.

"No ginger ale," remarked the man in the inevitable soiled white apron. He didn't offer an alternative.

"How come ya let a square in here, Joe?" joked a black-bearded youth at the next table. "Ginger ale yet."

"I'll have coffee," Kathy said quickly, capitulating. She kept her eyes from drifting to either one side or the other, feeling increasingly uncomfortable and alone.

The waiter moved away, languid and unsmiling, but the talkative lad at the next table edged his chair a trifle closer to Kathy's. "What's the trick, chick?" he asked in an undertone. "How come?"

Kathy felt as though she were a million miles from home, and as far as Spitzbergen from Harvard Square. This was a world she had never seen, a language she didn't understand. Her mouth felt dry and her hands were clammy with perspiration. Should she ignore this

creature or attempt to give him a civil answer which would kill his curiosity? She just didn't know.

While she hesitated, the young man stretched forth a bare foot in a leather sandal, hooked it around the leg of the empty chair next to Kathy's, and pulled it toward him. Then he moved a little closer, and using the chair seat as a hassock, crossed his legs and regarded his dirty toenails dispassionately.

"I asked you how you happened to wander into this cell," he repeated slowly, and without expression.

Cell? The word was strange, but Kathy promptly filed it away in her mind as an appropriately beat expression. "I thought it was open to the public," she said, with all the calmness she could muster.

"Oh, it is, it is. But most of the kids that come here are way out. Real cool, if you know what I mean. Society chicks like you don't often find their way down the alley."

"Society? Where did you ever get that idea?" Kathy asked.

"Look at your clothes," the boy sneered, eyeing her sweater and skirt and camel's-hair coat. "Best and Company, Peck and Peck. The usual." He made it sound as though she were parading in mink and diamonds, which any left-thinking eccentric was bound to scorn.

Kathy didn't answer. She might be collecting good

material for the *Orbit* feature, but the adventure had lost its attraction. Now she wished the waiter would bring his cup of foul brew from the *machina* so that she could make an attempt to drink it, and get out. But apparently, of all the people in the café, only she was in a hurry. The rest of this shabby lot looked as though they had settled down for the evening, and apparently the waiter thought, since she had fallen into conversation with a regular patron, that Kathy planned to do the same.

In any event, he didn't move in her direction, although he served three new arrivals, all hairy evangelists of Beatitude whose appearance obviously was as effective as a password.

Kathy tried to look as though she were listening to the guitar player, who was strumming a melancholy series of dissonant chords.

"Like the music?" her companion asked with a leer.

"It doesn't have any tune," Kathy replied.

The bearded lad shrugged. "Should it—necessarily? You conformists are all alike." He hitched his chair still closer to hers and made an abortive attempt at a smile. "You still haven't answered my first question. What gives?"

By now Kathy had forgotten what his first question had been about. She only knew that she found this fellow repulsive and actually smelly, yet she couldn't

brave the laughter which might follow her if she simply got up and walked out. The cup of *espresso* she had ordered seemed as important as an amulet. Once received, it would ward off evil, because she could make the token gesture of drinking it, then pay and depart.

How good—how delicious!—the fresh air would feel. She realized that she had been here less than fifteen minutes, but she might have been entombed for a year, so musty and unpleasant was the atmosphere.

She became aware, also, that there was only one other girl in the place, a lank-haired, hollow-chested young woman dressed in a ragged black sweater and slacks. I shouldn't have come, she thought to herself. I shouldn't have come at all, and especially not alone. Daddy would have a conniption fit—and for that matter, so would Rad. This was an assignment for one of the boys, not for me.

All this flashed through Kathy's mind as she tried to remember that elusive first question, because now this malcontent was tapping her on the shoulder impatiently. She drew away, fastidiously avoiding the slightest touch, and he leered even more disagreeably, leaning so close that she could feel his breath on her cheek.

Suddenly panic swept her. The last drop of desire to know how a real reporter feels evaporated. Real

reporters weren't fifteen years old; they were grown up and out of college and working on real newspapers, not the *Orbit*. She had been a fool!

But again Kathy had the sensation of being trapped in a dream. Her legs were stiff. She couldn't move, any more than a jointed wooden doll abandoned on a closet shelf could. "I'm doing a story for our school paper," she heard herself whisper, but was this her voice or was it an echo from her subconscious, resounding against the grubby plaster walls?

"Ho, ho, ho." There was no mirth in her companion's laughter, but Kathy saw, as in a trance, that he had raised a hand and was beckoning to the guitar player, who regarded the invitation with disinterest, yet began to amble over slowly, like a man going to a wake.

Kathy wanted to scream, but at that moment the cup of coffee she had ordered appeared on the table before her, along with a sticky sugar bowl and an ash tray which had been emptied but not washed.

Material objects—something she could touch, the coffee cup hot to her fingers, the spoon solid—had the effect on her nerves of a sharp reprimand. She gathered herself together and gave a tremulous sigh, as she might shudder in a dentist's chair. A few minutes more, and it would be over—with luck.

But luck did not seem to be running her way to-

night. Blackbeard's hand was once more moving toward her, creeping around the back of her chair with the sinuous movement of a snake. Now the progress of the guitar player was interrupted. The black-clad girl jerked his sweater in passing and he paused to talk with her two escorts, while Kathy sat as stiff as a poker, wondering frantically how she could escape.

At this point she gave up all pretense of trying to drink the coffee, but with trembling fingers pulled her wallet from a coat pocket and found two dimes and a nickel, which she slid across the table in the general direction of the sugar bowl.

Then a number of things happened simultaneously. There was a sudden breeze from the door, which opened and shut rapidly. Kathy glanced up, and was almost sure she saw her brother Jonathan, staring around the dark room with the expression of an avenging angel, but of course it must be fantasy, one dream melting into another created by wishful thinking. Tonight nothing could be real.

"What the heck?" In a flash he was standing before her, and in another flash, to the astonishment of the entire company, he had landed a quick right to Blackbeard's jaw. The sandaled feet flew up in the air, the chair toppled over, and Jon swept aside the table in front of Kathy. "Get out of here!" he commanded, in

a tone never equalled by Mr. Ashley at his most incisive. "Hurry up!"

Kathy grabbed her coat and scampered, dimly hearing the crash of the coffee cup and the tinkle of coins as they hit the floor. In another moment, miraculously free of pursuit, she and Jon were running down the alley and out into the blessed neon-lighted mediocrity of Dunster Street.

It wasn't until the Harvard Coop was in sight that they stopped, breathless. Then Jon grabbed Kathy's hand and hustled her across the street, through slow-moving traffic, to the family station wagon. "You dope," he hissed, as she opened the door and shoved her in. "You utter, complete, idiotic, imbecilic dope!"

Kathy gave a nervous giggle. "You can call me anything you like and I won't mind," she said thankfully, as she slid across the front seat. "Oh Jonnie, I couldn't believe you were real. I thought it must be a mirage. Honestly, I was that scared!"

She wasn't offended by the fact that he didn't answer, nor was she concerned by the controlled fury with which he turned the wagon into the stream of traffic and drove quickly toward home. She sat with her arms hugging her stomach, relief sweeping over her in waves, so solaced by Jonathan's mere presence that his state of mind mattered not one whit.

This was the old Jonnie, the brother who had dried

her tears and bandaged her cut knees and fished her out of the deep part of the swimming pool when a clowning contemporary thought a quick push might teach her to swim. He had a right to be angry, Kathy thought, but she was thankful beyond belief that he had come to her rescue, and it didn't matter how he had discovered her or what had impelled him. She lowered the window and took great gulps of the clean fresh air and didn't try to thank him—yet.

At the house, he pulled up in the drive with an expressive squealing of brakes, and Kathy got out and followed him meekly into the living room, where Dr. and Mrs. McCall were sorting color slides of orchids for the Garden Club's spring picture program. "Here she is!" he said, with a gesture which made Kathy feel rather like a puppy which had strayed from the safe premises of home. "Just as I thought. Face it, she doesn't have the sense of a two-year-old."

"Where were you, dear?" Mrs. McCall asked mildly. "When Brenda called and said she couldn't find you at the library, we began to get rather concerned."

"Where was she?" Jon roared, before Kathy could answer. "At some filthy beatnik joint near Harvard Square." He paused, then added with emphasis, "All alone."

"Were you really?" murmured her mother. "I suppose, after all, it's quite safe."

"Safe?" Jonathan snorted. "Those lads can't be trusted any farther than you can throw a freight car. She should know better, that's what!"

Dr. McCall put the slides he was holding down on the table. "Why did you want to go to such a place, Kathy?"

"I've been telling you all for days! To get a feature story—for Rad."

The words "for Rad" had slipped out inadvertently, but Jon immediately pounced on them. "'For Rad!'" he shouted. "Who's the feature editor of the *Orbit*, anyway? Not Rad. Me!" Pounding his chest, he glared at his sister indignantly.

All of a sudden Kathy's overtaxed emotions burst out of control and she collapsed in tears. "I'm sorry," she wept. "I didn't know it would be the way it was." Then she managed to sob, "Jonnie was simply wonderful. I don't know how he ever managed to find me, but—"

"Instinct," Jon told his parents. "Simple bird-dog instinct. When you said that Brenda said that Kathy said—"

"Hey, whoops!" broke in Dr. McCall.

"Well, anyway, Brenda had enough sense not to go along with this crazy scheme," Jon went on, as though his explanation were perfectly clear and reasonable. "But her guess was right when she said she wouldn't

put it past Kathy to go coffeehouse crawling alone."

Kathy buried her face in her hands and wept with even more abandon, just as Per appeared, unsuspectingly, in the living-room doorway. He glanced in consternation from Jonathan's worried face to Kathy's bowed head and made an attempt to step backwards into the hall. There was something so startled and light-footed in his movement that he looked, for a second, as though he were caricaturing a retreating ballet dancer, and it was in this pose that Mrs. McCall surprised him.

"Don't mind us, Per," she called to him, laughing. "It's just a minor crisis. Come on in."

Unexpectedly, in one of those quick shifts of mood which often follow emotional strain, Kathy began laughing too, a little hysterically, and after a moment the rest of the group joined in.

"Goodness," murmured Mrs. McCall, as she walked across the room to offer her daughter a handkerchief, "I'm certainly glad April isn't often."

Per looked puzzled. "What do you mean by that?"

Mrs. McCall spread her hands. "Storms. Sunshine. Things coming along in such unexpected spurts." She turned to her husband and cried, "Oh, Richard dear, isn't it lovely to be grown-up? I wouldn't be a teenager again for anything in the world!"

CHAPTER

17

From the window of the *Orbit* office, on Tuesday afternoon, Kathy could see a star magnolia with buds like fat pussy willows, just ready to burst. Spring was finally coming to Boston, heralded by purple and yellow crocuses, thrusting jonquils, and the first sweet-smelling flowers of the carlesi viburnum, which bloomed on the sunny side of the McCalls' house, close to the garden wall.

Like a silver lining to last night's cloud, four typewritten sheets lay beside the ancient office typewriter—Kathy's story on the beat coffeehouses, double-spaced black type on yellow paper, which looked very professional, with its crossed-out words and penciled corrections. She had managed to work in all the angles

—Boswell and Johnson in eighteenth century London, beards and blank verse, the west coast and Greenwich Village beat movements, and the particular atmosphere of the Cambridge hide-outs she had visited.

The feature had a ring of authenticity—as well it might have—and it also showed, she hoped, a certain sense of humor concerning the self-alienated young people whose antics, considered in the tranquil light of day, seemed to teeter between the amusing and the pitiful.

Rad came in with a sheaf of papers in his hand and his tie askew. He glanced from Kathy to the empty typewriter and said, “You through there? Mr. Ashley just gave me some advance dope on Commencement plans, but it’s got to be put into shape.”

“Want me to do it?” Kathy offered generously.

“Say, could you? It would be a big help.”

They worked quietly, side by side, for fifteen minutes, with only the clack-clack of the keys and the rustle of paper to indicate their business. Kathy wrote quickly, but her concentration did not prevent her awareness that she was happy this afternoon, at peace with herself and her world.

This was the thing she liked to do best, and with the person she liked best to do it. Reporters were bound to come and go, bringing in their bits and pieces of news and nonsense, but somehow the *Orbit*

office always seemed to belong to Rad. It was his place, the ground on which she had first come to know him as a person, and even Jonathan seemed like an interloper when at last, about five o'clock, he came banging through the door.

Still, Kathy looked up and smiled at her brother. She was very, very grateful to him for rescuing her, and with true feminine insight she realized that his anger had cloaked sincere concern. "Here's your story," she said with a grin, and handed him the yellow sheets she had not, this time, presented to Rad.

Jon glanced from Kathy to the editor warily, as though he suspected a trick. But Rad was absorbed in cutting a faculty handout, and didn't even look up.

"Thanks." Dropping his pile of books on the floor by the door, Jonathan came over and sat down at the other end of the table and started to read the pages, first casually, then with increasing interest and a chuckle or two. "Say, this is slick," he said spontaneously when he had finished, and moved down to a chair beside Kathy. "D'you think maybe we ought to get in a few more coffeehouse names, so nobody could pin it on one or two?"

Kathy didn't miss the word *we*, nor did she object to it. If Jon wanted to consider it their joint story, so much the better—and in a way he was justified. "Good idea," she agreed promptly. "Can you fill them in?"

And make any other changes you want to. This is just a rough draft."

At this Rad did look up. "Liar," he accused Kathy with a grin. "She's been working on that piece since three o'clock, Jon. Rough draft—hah!"

Kathy had the grace to blush, and laugh at herself. "You can't get away with a thing around here," she complained.

"You bet you can't. We're onto you," Jon answered, and the glance exchanged by the two boys was like an agreement that between them they planned to keep her in line.

They worked until after six, the three of them, Rad and Jon writing heads while Kathy corrected the almost illegible handwritten news stories of some of the younger assistants. "We'd better call it a day," Rad said finally. "What time do you kids eat?"

"Six-thirty," Jon replied, and whistled when he glanced at the clock. "Come on, Kath, we'll have to make a dash for it."

It seemed like old times to be hurrying along the quiet streets together, dog-trotting for a spell, slowing to a fast walk, then running again. Jon was unusually amiable. "Going too fast for you?" he asked Kathy, as they neared the house. She shook her head, but she was too breathless to speak. "Spring is sure bustin' out

all over," her brother remarked, waiting when he reached the front steps. "Look at that forsythia."

Spring was apparent in other ways too—in the increased tension among the seniors who had not yet heard from college admission boards, in Per's growing restlessness as the school year drew to an end and the time for returning to Sweden approached, in a lavish burst of bloom in the greenhouse, and in the tightening of the professor's already crowded schedule. With papers to be written and speeches to be delivered, he could frequently be found in his study at six o'clock in the morning as well as eleven o'clock at night.

Only Mrs. McCall seemed to grow more relaxed as the days grew warmer. She spent long hours in the garden, uncovering beds mulched with salt hay, packing last fall's leaves into the compost pile, and exclaiming with delight at each new primrose or hyacinth that showed color. The dining table bloomed with fragile spring blossoms, and Per was introduced to the succulence of New England asparagus and the dubious pleasure of skirmishing with the bony shad.

It was on an evening when Kathy seemed to have her mouth much too full of fishbones that Dr. McCall said, "By the way, your headmaster called me today. He wants me to give the Commencement speech."

Kathy's eyes widened with interest. Although she could do no more than make a sound in her throat she

managed to look pleased. But Jonathan, who had been so tractable lately, was aghast. "You're not going to, are you, Dad? You didn't say you could?"

The professor's eyes twinkled. "Would you have any serious objection, son?"

Jonathan groaned and, in a mockery of a Commencement speaker's style, started to declaim, "As I was walking across your beautiful green campus this sunny June morning, a rather apt little anecdote crossed my mind—" He regarded his parent shrewdly. "You said yes. I can tell."

Having managed to dispose of the interfering bones, Kathy burbled, "I think it's simply wonderful, Daddy!" Then she turned to her brother. "Your tongue's not exactly coated with tact."

Mrs. McCall laughed. "I know how Jon feels," she said understandingly. "You're just lucky your family doesn't embarrass you, Kathy. Mine did—shatteringly!—when I was Jonathan's age."

Per apparently felt that it was time the conversation took a more positive turn. "I'll consider myself fortunate to be able to hear you lecture, sir," he said very correctly, at which Dr. McCall got up and made a formal bow.

Actually, when Jon got used to the idea of his father's speaking at graduation, he didn't really mind. As he confessed to Kathy, things like this always came

as a bit of a shock. As for Rad, he thought the selection of the speaker a fine one, and came through with an amusing suggestion. "Why don't you two do an interview with your father?" he asked. "Something light-hearted and different. The *Orbit* needs a good front-page story, and I think this is an angle we shouldn't pass up."

Kathy looked at Jon, half expecting an objection, but her brother was tugging at one ear and thinking seriously. "You might have something there, boy," he said after an interval. "How about it, Kathy? Are you game?"

It surprised Kathy that she should hesitate, but she did. After a moment's thought she asked, "Why don't you tackle it alone, Jon? You're a good deal more experienced than I am, after all."

Jon shrugged. "If that's the way you want it." Rad opened his mouth to say something, but thought better of it. "O.K.," he agreed.

The cost in self-control on Kathy's part was something that neither boy would ever know, but she kept hands off completely. The interview was Jon's, and she didn't even pause in the study door when she heard him tackling their father that evening. Much as she would have enjoyed being in on the game, she felt instinctively that this time she should capitulate.

There was no doubt that the opportunity to handle

the story by himself bolstered Jonathan's self-esteem. He spent half an hour interrogating the Commencement speaker, and three long hours writing and re-writing the subsequent article for the *Orbit*. The bits and pieces he discarded filled an overflowing wastebasket.

The next morning, at the breakfast table, Jon had dark circles under his eyes. Knowing that it was midnight before he had gone to bed, Kathy wasn't surprised, but she hadn't expected him to seem worried, nor deliberately to seek her company on the way to school.

"You know," he said, as soon as he caught up with his sister, "maybe Rad was right. Maybe we should have tackled Dad together."

"Why?"

"Well, maybe I don't have quite the touch. Maybe I'm too serious or something. Look, Kathy, would you do me a favor? Just look this story over, will you, and see whether you think it rings the bell."

Jonathan—asking *her* for help? It seemed incredible—so incredible that Kathy could scarcely stifle a nervous bleat of amazement. But she managed to keep her voice calm and cool. "Sure, I'll be glad to," she said, and held out her hand for the folded typewritten sheets.

During first-period history, while the teacher's voice

droned on about the Industrial Revolution, Kathy's innocently opened notebook offered an opportunity to read Jon's article. Almost at once she decided there was nothing really wrong with it. The facts were all there—the honorary degrees in law and philosophy as well as in science, the awards and medals, the professorships and the record of universities and secondary schools attended. Their father had obviously led a crowded and rewarding life. But where, Kathy wondered, was the sparkle that attended his progress? Where was any mention of his orchids—the enormously satisfying hobby which supplemented his scientific interests in the way that a bit of really perfect French pastry tops off a dinner? Where, in fact, behind the imposing façade of the Commencement speaker was Dr. McCall, the man?

"Something lighthearted and different," Rad had said. But in his anxiety to do a thorough job, Jon had apparently erased the words from his consciousness. "More human interest," Kathy scribbled idly in the margin of her notebook. "More humor. More zip." These were recommendations easy to make but difficult to execute, for to incorporate them into an article on the Commencement speaker would be like walking a tightrope from which the unskilled could fall into a callow flippancy.

But perhaps between them? Kathy left a note on her

brother's home-room desk. "*Orbit* office after school?" and waited for him there anxiously, not sure at all how to advise him, only hoping he would be in an approachable mood.

Jon was late in coming. Kathy wandered restlessly around the empty office for a while and then, just to pass the time, sat down and pulled a sheet of paper through the typewriter.

She wrote, "Dr. Richard A. McCall, who will be the June 6 Commencement speaker, was repotting an orchid when this inquiring reporter encountered him. 'I beg your pardon, sir,' said the representative of the *Orbit* politely, 'but could I ask you a few impertinent questions about your life?'"

It was utter nonsense, of course, a spoof of an interview, but it possessed a few kernels of originality, a germ of an idea. When Jon finally came in, Kathy ripped the sheet out of the typewriter and turned it face down on the table.

Her brother said, "Well?"

"It's all right, Jonnie. It could go right in the paper the way it stands," said Kathy diplomatically, and noted that her brother looked relieved. "But do you really want to know what I think?"

"I asked you, didn't I?"

Kathy gulped a deep breath and took the plunge,

which she knew from past experience might be icy. "I think the whole interview needs fluffing up."

Jon frowned. "Speak English."

"It needs more humor, or something," Kathy said. "Daddy isn't a stuffed shirt, in spite of all his degrees and honors and things. Somehow don't you think we could get him to sound more—human?"

"Got any ideas?" Jonathan asked dubiously.

"A couple," Kathy admitted. "But I'm afraid you'll think they're gross."

Because his sister was borrowing one of his own pet slang terms, Jon grinned spontaneously. "Try me," he suggested.

"Well," Kathy said tentatively, "I was thinking if we could do the whole interview on a nonsense level, sort of off-beat, with you the reporter and Dad the great man, but each of you muffing your lines just a little, you'd get the same points across but they wouldn't be so prosy." Kathy's eyes began to glint as another idea hit her. "You might even save your own identity to the very end. Make it a sort of tag line, like the climax of a short-short story. Dad could say, 'O.K., son, that's enough!' You know!"

"Sounds pretty difficult to me," said Jon glumly.

"It won't be easy," Kathy admitted. "But I think we might work it out—together. And it could be heaps of fun!"

Jon pulled a chair out from the table and sat down. "I'm from Missouri—" he started.

"I'll show you," Kathy promised, and made a sudden decision. She picked up the overturned paper and held it out. "Something like this."

Without much enthusiasm, Jonathan started to read what his sister had written. Then he chuckled, reread it, and glanced up. "It's just crazy enough to be worth a try," he conceded, and reached for a stack of yellow paper. "Let's go."

An hour and a half later Rad found the pair of them, hunched over the office typewriter, whooping with merriment. "Well, you two certainly look cozy," he said, as he walked across the office. "What's the joke?"

"It's Jonnie's interview with Dad," Kathy told him. "You wanted something lighthearted and different. Well, this is it!"

"Can you get your father's O.K.?" Rad asked cautiously.

"Sure he can!" Kathy promised. "Daddy's a wonderful sport."

But Jon, leaning back in his chair now, was looking at his sister curiously. "Where do you get all this 'he' stuff?" he asked her, and his eyes met his sister's with the gruff brotherly affection Kathy remembered from so long ago. "It's *our* interview now."

"Well, how do you do," said Rad softly. "How *do* you do!"

CHAPTER



18

It was the sort of June day New Englanders refer to with pride, sunny but not too warm, with the sky as blue as a jay and the air so clear and sweet that the Commencement guests stepped lightly and briskly over the Academy lawn.

Inside the spreading tent where the exercises were to be held, all students except the graduating class were already seated, Kathy among them. Just across the aisle from her with the Fifth Formers, were Jon and Per, immaculate in white shirts and Academy blazers, and right beside Kathy was Brenda, crisp as a camellia in a striped pink cotton, and smiling faintly to herself as the first strains of the processional brought them all to their feet.

The Sixth Formers were graded by height, the tallest coming first down the center aisle, and when Rad passed, a lump rose in Kathy's throat. He looked neither to right nor left, and his expression was as dignified and serious as Per's.

Immediately after the graduates came the minister who would give the invocation, walking with the chairman of the Board of Trustees, and finally Dr. McCall and the headmaster, pacing slowly and almost casually in everyone's wake.

Dear Daddy! Kathy wondered if he was nervous. He didn't look it. But Jonathan, squirming in his seat as his father walked up on the platform in advance of Mr. Ashley, looked positively clutched, as he would have expressed it in the vernacular.

There was a brief prayer, and then, while Kathy sat with her hands clasped tightly in her lap, the headmaster introduced the speaker, commenting on his attainments as a biologist and mentioning the fact that Dr. Richard McCall had spoken to the school sixteen years before on another Commencement day.

Before I was born, Kathy thought, he went through all this before! She listened, bemused, as her father opened his speech with a jocular reference to his previous visit.

Mr. Ashley grinned behind the speaker's back, and Kathy could almost feel the audience relax. Why,

Dad's enjoying this, she realized with surprise. His warmth and friendliness were contagious, and she could sense that even with an important speech to make before a critical audience he wasn't in the least doubtful of himself. Suddenly he seemed like a completely different person from the father she'd always taken for granted. He was a man of stature, a scientist launched on a fascinating subject, the complicated operation of the human brain.

Even Jon began to lose his tenseness as his father talked about the hundreds of millions of years of evolution, during which the lower animals, by natural selection, learned to feel, to taste and smell, to hear and to see, until they developed into the higher animals, and eventually man appeared.

Kathy listened idly at first, then became really interested, because her dad was presenting all this old stuff in a new light, describing nerve impulses in the body which were tiny pulses of electric current.

"These, like a telephone system, convey sensations from the surface of the body to a group of internal switchboards, the brain. In man these switchboards are millions of times more complex than in a bee or an ant or even a monkey," he said, and told the audience how and why the electric circuits in an ant's brain, all hooked up to work when it is born, cause it to operate entirely by instinct.

"A man, on the other hand, has control over many of the circuits of his brain, and can plug in various connections to control his thoughts, and to a certain extent, his feelings," said Dr. McCall, and Kathy could tell that the boys, especially, were now listening carefully.

Per looked positively fascinated. Jon was sitting back in his chair and had stopped fidgeting. He was regarding his father with faint surprise but real interest, and Kathy knew exactly how he felt. All sorts of things she was hearing were new to her, but she tried hard to picture the synapses in the nervous system and brain, like tiny switches through which current could flow one way or the other to control memory and reasoning and imagination. It made her appreciate, for the first time, the wonder of being alive.

The intent, upturned faces of the graduating class seemed to fire Dr. McCall with extra enthusiasm for his subject. He explained that, as human beings, they had many more switchboards in their brains than they could ever learn to use; and somehow he managed to convey a picture of shiny electrical contacts of the mind that could be kept polished only by use. He talked about the different kinds of learning, of the need to develop more automatic dialing in the mind, and led from that to higher education, in the colleges

and universities to which many of the graduates would go.

Kathy again felt a tug at her heart. Next year Rad's day-by-day friendliness—his humor and understanding—would no longer brighten her life. They would be worlds apart, he a college freshman, she merely a class ahead at the Academy.

She tried to listen, but the words Dr. McCall was now speaking were not for her. "Until now," he said, "you have been taught, and taught well. But next fall you must begin to seek knowledge for its own sake. Then it will be up to you to keep those synapses bright!"

As her father sat down amid prolonged applause, Jonathan grinned across the aisle at his sister, with unexpected familial pride. Dad didn't let us down, his look said clearly, and Kathy gave a quick nod of assent.

She was proud—terribly proud—with a welling of affection that included not only her father but the whole family. It was marvelous to be part of the McCalls, even a small part, and the emergence of her father in his own sphere, in the capacity in which he functioned away from the familiarity of home and greenhouse, had burst upon her with the brightness of a rocket. Needing to share her emotion, she turned to Brenda and whispered, "He was O.K., wasn't he?"

Brenda nodded and whispered back. "Wonderful!

Sort of above my head, but I loved watching Jon's face."

Kathy redirected her attention to the platform, where Mr. Ashley was preparing to present the diplomas, but for a time she really pondered this admission. She likes him, she thought. In spite of everything, Brenda really likes Jon a lot. And it no longer seemed dismaying. It seemed, on this clear June morning, quite natural and even right.

Now the graduates were coming up, alphabetically, to shake hands with the headmaster and accept the red leather folders that contained the important endorsements of all their efforts for the past four years. "Thomas Welch Byron, Junior," Mr. Ashley was saying. "Jane Sherrerd Campbell, Leo Fitzgerald Chase."

Kathy sat a little straighter. "Radcliff Reed Cooper, with great distinction." The applause which greeted each graduate swelled even louder for Rad. How did his parents feel, she wondered, as they watched their son accept his diploma and knew that he had achieved *magna cum laude*? There was more than one proud person in this gathering today!

In a curious daze, Kathy listened to the rest of the names, clapping politely as each graduate mounted the platform steps. Then she drifted out of the tent on the tide of her classmates and began to search for her

parents in the milling throng. School was over for another year!

The rest of the day passed in a hustle-bustle of preparation. The McCalls were having a farewell party for Per, and since the weather was so perfect, it was decided to light Japanese lanterns in the garden, bring torches and the record player to the terrace, and set up refreshment tables on the lawn.

While Per packed (everyone insisted that he mustn't help) Kathy and Jonathan rearranged outdoor furniture, set up card tables for the serving of soft drinks, and helped their mother unwrap paper plates and napkins, besides collecting forks for cake, and spoons for ice cream, and all the other appurtenances for an evening get-together of some thirty teen-agers.

Dr. McCall, after a hasty lunch, had hurried back to the university to teach an afternoon class of graduate students and then go on to work at his lab. When he left the house Kathy ran after him, and reached up to kiss him good-by. "You were wonderful this morning," she whispered privately, her mouth close to his ear, then walked back into the house very slowly, wishing she could tell him that his speech had given her a glimpse of an adult world so important that everything else paled by comparison.

Everything except Rad, decided Kathy, with charac-

teristic honesty. The fact that he was coming tonight buoyed her up, and made Per's leave-taking almost easy to accept. He had been a wonderful friend, a splendid substitute brother during a time when she had needed him desperately, but now she could manage without him, because she had Jon back.

Not that the entire family wasn't sorry to see Per go, but they knew he was fretting to get home—as who wouldn't be, Kathy thought, after nine months? And they knew, too, that they weren't saying good-by forever. Already Per was planning to return for a year of graduate study after finishing at the university in Stockholm. Boston had apparently won a special place in his heart.

Then too, there were warm invitations from the Hedlunds to both Jonathan and Kathy—with Per repeating that of course they must come to Sweden, and soon!

Jon told Per in front of everyone that he thought there was a good chance of his getting over there—not this summer but next. "I'm going to get a well-paid job and save my money, boy!"

"Whatever you save I'll match," his father said promptly, and this made Kathy feel that summer a year from now was a mere hop-skip-and-jump away.

Meanwhile, although Kathy was sure that nothing would make up for Rad's absence, there were a few

bright spots in the coming year. Most important was that she was to be the new feature editor of the *Orbit*, with Jonathan—as predicted—editor in chief.

The announcement had been made in the final issue of the paper, delivered after the Commencement exercises. In the same issue had appeared the brother-sister story on the speaker, which had seemed to attract the attention of adult guests as well as the student body. Surreptitiously, Kathy had watched the faces of people glancing at the *Orbits* thrust by Fourth Form couriers into their hands, and she could almost certainly tell when they came upon the McCall interview, because they invariably chuckled and turned in amusement to point out the feature to a friend.

The article she had written with Jonathan stood up well in print. It made her father almost as warm and as human a person as he was in real life. But the announcement of the new *Orbit* staff had seemed still more exciting in Kathy's eyes. Even though she had known it was coming, the appearance of her name below Jonathan's, in irrefutable black type, made the paper worth propping against the mirror above her bureau. She did just this, glancing at it from time to time as she dressed for the party that evening. Jonathan and Kathleen McCall!

She knew they'd be in for a good deal of teasing. "Hey, what's this?" people were bound to say of the

brother-sister team. "A monopoly?" But she hoped fervently that they could put out a good paper, and working together no longer seemed a problem. Oh, of course Jon was bound to try to boss her a bit, but Kathy felt she could take it. As her mother said, patience was a very convenient virtue in a woman, one to cultivate.

"Kathy!"

Per's voice at her bedroom door made her glance around the room, which was in order, and check her own appearance, which was reasonably complete.

"Hi, Per. Come on in. I'm just ready to go down."

The Swedish boy opened the door timidly, and stood on the threshold, reminding Kathy for the hundredth time, by his hesitance, that casual American manners were not for him. "I—I just wanted to give you this," he said, holding out a tiny package, "as a sort of farewell present, you know."

"Why, Per!" Kathy was touched. "You've given me so many presents," she murmured, thinking of the book of poetry and the scarf on her birthday last month.

"Not such an important one, though, as you have given me."

"I?" Kathy didn't understand. She looked up from untying the ribbon on the box, frankly puzzled.

"You gave me your friendship," Per said without

embarrassment. "Even that first day. This is something I do not think I could have done without."

"But you've made so many friends!" Kathy cried.

Per smiled. "Acquaintances, yes. Friends? You and Jonathan. But especially you, Kathy."

So afraid she might cry that she tried hard to laugh, Kathy reached for the light touch. "Why, Per, I didn't know you cared!" she murmured jokingly, but she lowered her eyes as she opened the box.

In it were a pair of earrings, little gold stars set with brilliants. Kathy took them out and fitted them to her ears. "They're beautiful," she said, turning for his inspection. "They make me feel so sophisticated!" She ran over and put up her arms and hugged him impulsively. "Oh, Per, we're going to miss you so much!"

"Hey, you kids! People are coming," Jonathan warned suddenly, calling up the stair well, and together they hurried down.

"Mother!" Kathy cried. "Look at my new earrings! Per gave them to me. Don't I look grown-up?"

On the terrace a group was already gathering, while Jon started the record player and Brenda, obeying instructions, scattered powdered wax on the bricks. "Get enough of this stuff on the soles of our shoes and *we'll* be slippery, if the bricks aren't," she told Kathy confidently. "At least that's what Jonathan says."

Jon winked at Per slyly. "Got that girl right under my thumb!" he bragged.

"Down, boy," cautioned Kathy, with a twinkle in her eye as she remembered the evening at the Coopers'. "I wouldn't be too sure."

It was pleasant teasing, with no edge of waspishness, just the sort of nonsense the McCalls had always enjoyed. The four stood for a moment, laughing together in mutual understanding, and then Kathy saw, out of the corner of her eye, that Rad had arrived, alone.

He was standing on the path which led to the terrace from the walled garden, watching them quizzically. Kathy turned at once and walked toward him, her eyes still sparkling with amusement at the conversation just ended, her earrings twinkling in the fading evening light. "Hello, Rad," she said, suddenly shy. "I couldn't find you this morning to say congratulations and things."

"Your father made a great speech," Rad said. "I want to tell him so."

"You can. He's around somewhere."

But quickly, as always, Rad was surrounded, and it was fully an hour before he managed to break loose and look Dr. McCall up in the greenhouse, where he had fled to escape the overwhelming numbers of his children's friends. Mrs. McCall was the sort of person

who could flit around on the edge of a teen-age party and enjoy herself, but her husband was always thrown into a sort of panic. Only as individuals, he confessed, could he understand the young.

Rad, however, he welcomed into his sanctum with real pleasure. "Very nice, the *magna cum*," he said at once. "I only hope Jon does as well."

"He will, sir," Rad said with certainty, and went on to tell him how much he had enjoyed the morning's speech. They talked together for fifteen minutes, very comfortably, while Kathy danced first with Steve Whitely, then with Buzz and finally with Per, making the kind of light conversation expected of her, but all the time wishing Rad would hurry back.

It was quite dark when he finally returned. Fireflies glowed in the cascading leafy branches of the elms, and the tall kerosene torches sent a flickering light over the dancers, making the girls in their summer dresses seem unusually fragile, and lending a deceptive air of maturity to the boys.

Over Per's shoulder Kathy caught a sudden sight of Rad, standing by the steps leading down to the back garden. She wished that he was looking lonely but he merely looked alone. "Per, do you mind if I run get a sweater?" she asked, when the record ended. "Dance with Carla! She'll be mortally wounded if you don't!"

Then she ran up to her room and grabbed up a

white cardigan with trembling fingers, hurrying down again two steps at a time, because she was so afraid Rad might already be dancing with somebody else.

But he was still idling by the steps, and when she came through the screen door he saw her, illuminated for a moment by the brilliance of the inside lights. To her intense relief Kathy watched him smile and cut through the dancers toward her. "Can you leave your big Swede," he asked, "long enough to take a walk?"

"He isn't mine, he isn't really big, and he isn't a Swede—he's Swedish," Kathy retorted with a laugh. She pulled the sweater over her shoulders, and by way of acceptance tucked her hand through Rad's arm.

He led her across the semicircle of lawn and around to the back of the greenhouse, now dark, and on through what Mrs. McCall termed the wild garden, a part of the property that had never been properly cleared. At the back there was a low stone wall, and here Kathy sat down and took off her shoes. "High heels should be prohibited by law," she said.

"Stop chattering," Rad commanded unexpectedly. "I want to talk to you."

"Why, sir!" Kathy couldn't resist saying, but the next cliché—"This is so sudden"—died on her lips, because Rad looked more serious than ever before.

"You know," he said, "while they were handing out diplomas this morning, I got to thinking. Next year

I won't be here. I'll be off at Amherst. That's an awfully long distance away."

"It's still Massachusetts," said Kathy feebly, but she felt—oh, how strongly she felt!—that it was almost as far as the moon.

"Kathy, what about Per?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you—interested in him?"

"I adore him," Kathy said. "He's been like a brother—when Jon wasn't—this last year."

Rad let out a heartfelt sigh. "Well, that's a relief," he confessed. "I was afraid—" He broke off, and standing before her, reached out and gathered Kathy's hands in his. "What I've been trying to say is that I don't think I realized, until this morning, how much I'm going to miss you—how much I really like being with you. I wish you felt the same way!"

The lights through the trees were a blur, the slow dance music a mere background melody to the song in Kathy's heart. "Oh, but I do! I do!" she breathed.

Rad peered at her closely. "Enough to go steady?"

This was different. Kathy's heart tightened and began to thump, as she wondered how she could possibly answer him. "Yes," she said slowly, "enough. But it wouldn't be fair. I'm only just sixteen, and you'll be eighteen by fall. You're going on to a differ-

ent world, Rad, the way Daddy said. How do you know you'll feel this way next year?"

"I know," Rad said, with all the courage of his youthful conviction.

It cost her the greatest effort she had ever been forced to make, but Kathy shook her head. "Neither of us really know," she said. "Anyway, going steady's for lazy people, Rad. Honestly it is. Can't we just—keep on seeing each other—during this summer. Can't we just be friends?"

She was so earnest, so very anxious, that Rad smiled in spite of himself. "We can, Kathy. I didn't mean to rush you. I guess it was just Commencement and all that made me realize a lot of things."

"I guess," Kathy murmured, just above a whisper. Then, in her bare feet, she slipped down from the wall and stood on tiptoe and reached up to kiss him. "Please," she said. "Please!" But she didn't know what she was begging for, and then she leaned against him for a moment and sighed, "It's lovely just being alive."

